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DEADWOOD DICK'S DOOM; or, CALAMITY JANE'S LAST ADVENTURE.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "GILT-EDGED DICK," "BONANZA BILL," ETC., ETC.



THEN, WITH VICTORIOUS SHOUTS, THE ROUGH CROWD STRODE AWAY, AND DEADWOOD DICK SUNK GRADUALLY INTO THE YIELDING SAND, TO HIS HORRIBLE DOOM.

Deadwood Dick's Doom;

OR,

Calamity Jane's Last Adventure.

A TALE OF DEATH NOTCH.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSE-BUD ROB" NOVELS, "WILD FRANK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

TOO LATE FOR THE STAGE.

DEATH NOTCH!

Did you ever hear a more uninviting name for a place, dear reader? If so, you could not well find a harder hole, where dwelt humanity than Death Notch, along the whole golden slope of the West.

It was said that nobody but rascals and roughs could exist in that lone mining camp, which was confirmed by the fact that it was seldom the weekly stage brought any one there, who had come to settle. Even the Government officials, cognizant of the lawlessness within the borders of Death Notch, hesitated to interfere, because of the desperate character of the residents—hardest of the hard.

The town lay in a sort of mountain-surrounded basin, on the route from Pioche, Nevada, to Helena, Montana, and had formerly been an Indian camp, until a "well-heeled" but notorious young gambler named Piute Dave had come along and driven the reds away, as he was able to do, having a backing of some forty ruffians of his own stamp.

There being but a comparative handful of the reds, they had been scattered, when Piute Dave and his gang went to prospecting, and in a short time discovered paying dirt.

Since that the population had gradually increased to a hundred and fifty people, nearly all of the ruffian type, and all under the order of the man, Piute Dave, who ruled as a king over the others.

In the days when the Indians had held possession, the town had been called Sequoy; afterward it had been named Golden Eagle, until a few months past, when, by vote, it had been re-christened Death Notch.

Of course there was a reason for this—a reason both peculiar and striking.

When the Indians had been driven forth, their chief, Red Hatchet, had declared vengeance upon the pale-face intruders, and cursed the town, vowing to kill off every pale-face who should enter it, and to mark each death by a notch upon the council-pole.

This pole was a tall young pine that grew just at the edge of the town, and around which it had been the custom of the tribe to hold council.

Nor had the chief lied.

For several years he and the members of his tribe had waged warfare upon the usurpers, and a score or more had bit the dust, and a notch upon the council-tree had recorded each stroke of vengeance.

But, as Piute Dave constantly added new roughs to his gang, the Indians also gradually diminished, until no more death notches had appeared upon the tree.

This state of affairs had continued until about three weeks before our story opens, when a placard had been found tacked to the council-tree, bearing the following message:

"Beware! Red Hatchet is not yet gone the way of his forefathers, but lives to wreak vengeance upon the town of Death Notch. In the interval of silence he has only been recruiting his fury."

"RED HATCHET."

With the name, "Death Notch," Piute Dave seemed strangely impressed, and at once ordered that the town of Golden Eagle be henceforth known as Death Notch.

Death Notch gloried in one important fact—that it was the midway stage station between Helena and Pioche, and the terminus of two stage lines. All traffic from Pioche to Helena,

or *vice versa*, had to be transferred at Death Notch from one stage or freight line to another.

As a result, the arrivals and departures of stages being very irregular, it was a common thing for passengers or freight to be laid off at Death Notch for a number of days.

It was a delay that very few relished, who knew the bad repute of the place, but there was no help for it, except for passengers to go on afoot through a howling wilderness.

The Wednesday's stage of the second week of September whirled down into Death Notch about noon, from the mountain trail, and drew up before the "Poker House," with a noisy rumble—for the Poker House was the only hostelry afforded transient patronage at Death Notch.

"Change keers fer Helena!" yelled out Buck Piper, the driver, and then he threw the ribbons to one of several bleary-eyed-looking pilgrims who were standing in front of the tavern sunning themselves, and made for the "licker" department, to moisten his throat, leaving his "fares" to take care of themselves.

There were but two passengers to-day, and they at once disembarked from the stage, upon the plank walk in front of the Poker House.

They were widely at contrast, in appearance, though evidently traveling companions, the one being a pretty young lady, while the other was a long-geared, loosely constructed colored man, of the 'darkest ray serene.'

The young lady evidently was not over seventeen or eighteen years of age, but was the possessor of a fine figure, and prettily chiseled features, set off by starry black eyes, and wavy brown hair. She was attired with a long ulster duster over her dress, a silk scarf about her throat, and a veiled hat upon her head, and was by all odds the trimmest little craft that had anchored in Death Notch in many a day.

The darkey was a very sable individual, with a genuine negro physique from the thick-lipped mouth of huge dimensions, to the rolling ludicrous eyes, and light curling hair. His feet, too, were of extraordinary size, while the rest of his person seemed hastily constructed and loose jointed, in the extreme.

He was attired in wide-legged plaid pantaloons, too short at the waist and feet, by half a foot; a white vest, and white shirt with wide cuffs and collar, a swallow-tailed coat cut tight at the waist, and a white silk hat somewhat the worse for bad usage.

In his hand he carried a bag containing an instrument shaped very much like a banjo, while the young lady carried a small hand sachel.

On leaving the stage-coach the strangely contrasted pair paused a moment as if in doubt which way to go, and the young lady turned to one of the low-browed, villainous-looking pilgrims lounging on a bench before the tavern.

"Can you tell me, sir, how long before the stage will leave for Helena?" she asked, in a pleasant voice.

"No, mum, I reckon not," the addressed party said, "ca'se how I don't know. Thar comes Hank Shakespeare, the poet, however—mebbe he kin put ye onter what yer wanter know."

And he indicated a tall, raw-boned individual who was approaching—a man who looked as though he might be the possessor of a great deal of brute strength and dogged courage, especially the latter, for he was swarthy and ugly of countenance, wearing a stubble of beard and long matted hair, while his brows were shaggy and his eyes evil and bloodshot.

He was attired in stogy boots, dirty patched overalls and overshirt, a battered, shapeless 'plug' hat, minus the rim, while in a belt about his waist he wore four large-sized revolvers and a bowie.

Anything but a poet, looked the big bull-whacker, and the young lady was discussing doubt, this when he came up, and paused to take a survey of her and the coon.

"Hello! a nigger and a gal, hey! Waal,

'Let's all shout an' rejoice!
We heer a female's voice.'

How'dy do, mum! Goin' ter settle here? We're jest needin' a woman, in this hyar camp, 'ca'se how, ye see, when ther b'yees wanten go courtin' they've got ter court one another."

"No, I am not going to settle here," the young woman replied, quite promptly. "I wish to find out what time the stage leaves for Helena?"

"Hell—ener! Why, bless ye, mum, ther next stage won't go fer a week, I allow, 'ca'se how she started six hours ago. No stage 'fore next Wednesday, sure."

An exclamation of disappointment escaped the young lady.

"Oh! that is too bad! I wouldn't have missed reaching Helena for a good deal. Is there no way I can overtake the stage, sir?"

"Reckon not, miss, onless ye hoof et, an' I opine ye wouldn't ketch et, then. Ef yer feet war as large as ther nigger's I reckon ye might do it, for—

'E'en Dexter could not compete.
Wi' thet fragrant coon's feet'—

and stand any show o' winnin' ther heat. No, mum, I allow yer best holt is ter stop right hyar in Death Notch, till next stage."

"I cannot afford to—it seems I must reach Helena, one way or another. Cannot we hire saddle horses—or purchase them, even—in order that we may overtake the stage?"

"Nary a hoss. Ther only thing wi' four legs, 'cept Piper's team, is a pair o' oxen."

At this juncture the thirsty Piper appeared upon the scene, wiping his mouth from a recent lubrication in the shape of a bootleg.

"Oh! sir, cannot I prevail upon you to take us on until we overtake the Helena stage?" the girl said, turning to him, appealingly. "We have an engagement to fulfill, and must be in Helena by Saturday night, or throw it up!"

"Sorry, mum, but my route don't go no further than heer, an' I can't accommodate ye!" the worthy Piper piped, taking a chew of tobacco.

"But I will pay you for it—I'll give you twenty dollars, if you will put us on board the Helena stage."

"Couldn't tech me wi' a hundred dollars, mum, fer I ain't in need o' tin. Ye kin git 'commydations at Poker Jack's ranch, till next week, an' I allow ef ye kin flip ther boards right purty wi'out hidin' the ace up yer sleeve, ther boys won't let ye git lonesum."

"I don't thank you for your assurance, sir!" was the haughty reply. "Come, Nic, let's see if we can get a room."

And they entered the office, which also served the purpose of bar and gambling room.

A score or more of ruffianly looking fellows were lounging about, but one among the lot, more prepossessing than the rest, arose and came forward, as the two travelers entered.

He was dressed in white woolen garments, with white shirt and collar, slippers upon his feet, and a round red smoking cap upon his head. In form he was of graceful build, while he was not bad-looking in face, except for a habitual wicked glitter of his black eyes, and a faint cynical expression which lurked under his graceful mustache.

"Excuse me, but did you wish to see me?" he said, on approaching.

"If you are the proprietor, yes, sir," the girl replied, a little timidly.

"Yas, if youh be de boss, we'se gwine ter ax ye, hab youh proper 'commodations for two fust-class gusts?" the darkey put in, with a considerable amount of airiness.

"No! no! not gusts—you mean guests, Nick," the girl interrupted.

"Yas, guests—dat's it. Without purpotential precontemplation, I accidently absented one bowel from de syllable. You see, boss, as de stage done went off an' left us, we wants to engaged apartments an' superlative substance whereon to subsist for sebberral days henceforemost until de next vehicle de perigrinates dis yar way."

"Ah! yes, I understand. You wish first-class accommodations, which I can furnish. My name is Poker Jack, at your service, and if

you will register, I will show you to a couple of rooms."

They accordingly went to a desk and registered their names in a book kept for that purpose—the darky as—

"Nicodemus Johnsing, Star Comedian;" the young lady as—

"Miss Virgie Verner, of New York."

Then Poker Jack escorted them to a suit of rudely furnished rooms, up-stairs, just over the large bar and gambling-room.

"If you will be so kind, we would prefer our meals sent to our rooms," Miss Verner said.

"As you like, miss. Have you any baggage?"

"My baggage will be along on the freight wagon, sir."

Then Poker Jack bowed himself out.

After he had gone, the girl called in the darky from the adjoining room.

"Nic," she said, "we shall have trouble in this place, mark my word. All are men here, and the most evil, repulsive-looking lot I ever came across."

"'Spect you're right, Miss Virgie, but youh jes' bet youh life dey doesn't want to come foolin' around dis chile, or I'll carve 'em—cut 'em up, bad! I'se sum an' a half, when I'se mad!"

"But, allowing that we are both brave, what could we do against such overwhelming odds, should they offer to harm us? Oh! why did we venture here? We shall surely be followed by the human bloodhound, my enemy, and God only knows what evil he can do in this place, where the people look capable of any terrible crime. Oh! I am so tired, so weary of this hunted life."

The freight wagon arrived soon after the stage, and unloaded two trunks in front of the Poker House.

Upon the end of one was pasted part of a theater bill, which read, "Miss Vergie Verner, the charming vocalist and musician." On the other trunk was the other part of the programme, reading; "Nicodemus Johnsing, banjoist and dancer."

A crowd of bystanders stood, read, and pondered over these little announcements, Hank Shakespeare among the rest.

"Yas, sir ee, bobtail hoss, b'yees, them's a pair o' show people, goin' ter Hell-ener, an' they reckon they kin slight us cusses hyar at Death Notch, by not hevin' their sarcus heer. But they ken't, not fer Jim. I tell ye what! I purpose we trot 'em down inter thèr bar-room o' Poker Jack's crib, ter-night, an' mak'em give us a show, as well as ther fellers at Hell-ener. What d'ye say?"

"Bulldog Ben barks yes," a little, disgusting-looking ruffian cried, and the whole gang chimed in assent.

Therefore, it was as good as settled that something was to occur.

CHAPTER II.

A COMPACT WITH THE DEVIL'S OWN.

ABOUT sunset of that same day, in a lonely gulch leading off from Death Notch, a young girl was wandering along with a basket upon her arm, now and then plucking a wild flower, and singing the while in spirit with the merry birds that warbled among the branches of the trees around her.

She was at a glance an Indian, but lighter complexioned than the average of her nation, betraying a mixture of white blood in her veins.

Attired in the picturesque garb of an Indian princess, she looked decidedly pretty, with her dusky skin, her eyes of midnight color, and long sweeping wealth of wayy raven hair, which fell back below her waist.

In keeping with the wild scene around her, was she, and yet happy and free from care as the merry little chipmunk that darted across her path and disappeared in the shrubbery.

"Pretty mountain doves a-cooing,
Sturdy robins gone a-wooing—
Wonder what all birds are doing,
So happy, all, they seem,"

she sung, as she stopped to pluck a pretty blossom from its stalk.

"And, by the way, little bird, suppose you tell us what you are doing," a voice exclaimed, and the owner, a tall, well-dressed man, of prepossessing countenance, and the owner of a monstrous mustache, stepped from a clump of bushes where he had hitherto been concealed.

The Indian girl started violently, at sight of him, and would have run away, but he stepped quickly forward and seized her by the arm.

"Hold on! pretty bird! Don't be scared, I will not harm you!" he said, laughingly. "I simply want to have a talk with you."

"No! no! Siska does not know pale-face; he must let her go."

"But I can't do that just yet. Come to this log and sit down and answer some questions which I shall ask you, and then I will let you go."

And still retaining a hold of her hand and arm, he forced her to a seat upon a fallen tree, close by.

"There," he said, when they were both seated. "Now we're all prepared for a nice little chat."

The girl did not reply.

She was evidently greatly frightened, for she was trembling like a leaf.

The stranger noted the fact.

"Don't be afraid, my girl," he repeated, "I'll not hurt you. Now, to begin with, I want you to tell me how far it is from here to a place called Death Notch?"

"A couple of miles, or so."

"Ah! so near. Well, I'm in luck. Now, what is your name?"

"Siska, sir. Please let me go. Red Hatchet would be very angry if he knew I spoke to a pale-face."

"Oh! he would, eh? So he's one of those rabid old bucks who is dead set on the white race?"

"Red Hatchet is a great warrior, and his anger is to be feared."

"Well, then, when you see him next, tell him to slice me a chunk of it, weighing about half a pound, and send it down to Death Notch. Now, Siska, you seem to be a pretty nice girl—how'd you like to go along with me to Death Notch, an' keep house fer me, in a snug little ten by twenty?"

"No! no! Siska not like it. She must return to the wigwam of her father."

"Oh! don't be in a hurry. I'll give you a lot of gold rings and other trinkets if you will go with me—and plenty of money."

"No! no!" the girl repeated, impatiently.

"Siska not like pale-face—no go with pale-face. Let the Indian girl loose, so that she can return to her father's lodge."

"Well, then you must give me a kiss, my bird of the wilderness, and you can go."

"No! no! Siska not kiss pale-face," she answered, struggling to release herself. "Pale-face bad man, and Red Hatchet be angry at him."

"That don't matter to me. A kiss I'm going to have before you go, or my name's not Carrol Carner. So pucker up those pretty lips, my beauty, and submit to the inevitable!"

"No! no! Help! help!" she screamed, struggling so violently that he found it impossible to accomplish his design.

"Curse you—you are as strong as a young bear," he gritted savagely.

"Aha! I have you now, though, and now for my kiss!"

"Not by a jugful, stranger!" a stern voice cried, accompanied by rapidly approaching footsteps, and the next instant Carrol Carner found himself lying at full length upon the ground, while over him stood a handsome fellow, in sportish dress—valiant Deadwood Dick.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, sarcastically—"what a figure you cut, now, don't you, my presuming pilgrim? You reckoned you had this little girl dead to rights, didn't you, you infernal skunk, because she was alone and unprotected? But, you see, all signs fail, when the wind blows me down!"

"The devil take you," Carrol Carner cried, arising to a sitting posture, and rubbing his cheek where the imprint of Deadwood Dick's knuckles were yet to be seen. "Who are you, that you have this audacity?"

"A cuss from Custer—a bulldog from Bozeman—a diabolical devil from Deadwood," Dick replied, dryly. "I don't carry any visiting cards with me, as I generally have a sheriff, or marshal after me who carries them, and posts 'em up in every convenient place, viz:—'Five Hundred Dollars reward for the capture of the notorious outlaw, Deadwood Dick, dead or alive.' Seen any of them gentle little reminders, up in this section?"

"If I had, I should use my own judgment about imparting the information to you," Carrol growled, arising to a standing position. "I want to know what business you had to strike me."

"The business of being consolidated protective association for the protection of widows and orphans, an' weak humans, generally. I found you, an unscrupulous knave, attempting to kiss this girl against her will, and I very naturally lost control of my pugilistic members to that extent that you immediately let her alone and set down."

"You shall answer for the insult, sir. I am going to Death Notch. If you take pains to come there also, I'll punish you, severely."

"Karect!" Deadwood Dick assented, with a taunting bow. "You may look for me, to-night, Senator. Be kind enough to pedestrianize hence most precipitately, now, will you, as your presence is doubtless very disagreeable to this young lady."

"Yes, I'll go, but remember, you shall yet repent your insult to me!" Carner replied fiercely.

"For fear I may forget the admonition perhaps I'd best write it down in my diary," was the sport's parting shot, as the stranger turned and stalked down the gulch.

When he had gone from view Dick turned to the Indian girl, who stood a few paces away, regarding him with surprise in her big black eyes.

"There, miss, I've banished the snake, and you need have no fear of his harming you," he said, gallantly. "Luck always lets me happen along to lay out such reptiles as he."

"Pale face bravo very good, and Siska is grateful to him for driving off the bad pale-face," the girl replied, her eyes lighting up, wonderfully. "Red Hatchet be very glad, when Siska tells him."

"Ah! so you are the daughter of the stern-handed chief, Red Hatchet, are you?"

"I am. What does Deadwood Dick know of Red Hatchet?"

"Oh! So you infer that I am Deadwood Dick, eh? You are sharp! I heard the history of Red Hatchet and Death Notch, before I came this way. I allow Death Notch is a pretty tough town."

"Its lodges are filled with bad men, and Red Hatchet has placed a curse upon their heads, and all who enter the town to stay. Surely you are not going there."

"Well, I reckon so. Thought I'd drop down that way, see if any one was in trouble, and if so, help 'em out."

"Then, let Siska give you a token, to always shield you from the vengeance of Red Hatchet or his agents," and she took a large tin star from her pocket, with a ribbon attached to it, and pinned it to Dick's vest; then, turning, she waved her hand at him, and darted into the forest with the speed of a young antelope.

Far up the mountain-side, not noticeable from Death Notch, yet from where the town was plainly visible, nestling in the basin, was a great projecting crag, the top of which was a plateau as level as a floor. From the outer edge of the crag to the yawning abyss among the mountains was a sheer descent of mayhap five hundred feet.

Death Notch was not at the foot of the mountain from which the crag projected, a

low range of hills intervening, but was plainly visible from the plateau, with the naked eye, being not over a mile distant on a bee-line.

Seated upon a camp stool, on this plateau, on the afternoon of the day which opens our story, engaged in a survey of the town through a powerful field glass, was an old Indian of bent form and wrinkled features—the wreck of a once great warrior, now almost in his second childhood from old age.

This was the father of the girl Siska—Red Hatchet.

For hours he had sat there, and studied the town through his glass, the varying expressions of his countenance and the glitter of his dark baleful eyes proving that a revengeful spirit yet rankled in his breast.

"The stage brings two new-comers," he muttered, in good English, proving that he was not untutored, like many of his race. "One is a young pale-face squaw—the other a son of the South. I wonder what brings them? It cannot be that they know of the curse that rests upon the place and all who enter it."

Then for a long time the outcast chief was silent, but watchful, until a man sauntered along down the street whom he recognized, through the glass, although to the naked eye the man looked but a pigmy from the cliff.

"That is Piute Dave—devil pale-face," the chief grunted, fiercely. "Red Hatchet hates him more than all the rest, and yet he lives and enjoys Red Hatchet's possessions, heedless of warnings of death and destruction. He knows Red Hatchet is too old and feeble to take the war-path—therefore he defies me. But he shall die—they all shall die, for Red Hatchet has sworn to add new notches to the council-pole—records of the death of those who drove him and his tribe forth from Sequoy, even if he has to hire it done. Oh! how Red Hatchet hates yonder settlement of pale-faces!"

"And why this hatred, red-man? Why this desire to exterminate the people in yonder town?" a voice asked, so near to the old chief, that he turned with a startled growl, and beheld—

Not what might have been correctly termed a man, but more appropriately a human wild beast, for it had all the appearance of a wild animal, with the dwarfed shape of man. The face was entirely covered with hair, the head was hatless, the dwarfed, hump-backed figure was clad in ragged dirty garments; the nails upon the fingers were long and like the talons of some wild bird.

In the eyes there burnt a wild unnatural fire, and the hair upon the head stood in all directions, making the head appear double its real size.

Red Hatchet gave vent to a startled grunt at sight of this strange being; indeed, who wouldn't, for it was not an object calculated to inspire any one with the bravest feelings.

"Ugh! debbil!" the chief uttered, for that was the nearest thing he could compare the intruder to.

"Yes, devil!" the hairy being replied—"Old Scavenger, the devil-avenger—the devil dwarf. But, the red chief need not fear. Scavenger harms none but the treacherous whites—those of his own blood and color. The red chief also hates the pale-faces?"

"Ugh! yes—hate 'em because they drove the red man from his village yonder."

"I understand—I understand," Old Scavenger assented. "They have wronged me, too, and I madly hate 'em all. I have registered an oath to spare none—to cut out the hearts of every white devil I meet. Ha! ha! they thought when they all united to strike me a last blow, that it would kill me, but it only hardened my heart against 'em. Did the Red Hatchet ever see the heart of a pale-face?"

And as he spoke the Demon Dwarf drew from his hunting sack a bloody withered piece of human flesh—a human heart, indeed—and held it aloft with a demoniac peal of laughter.

"That is the heart of the false woman who wedded me for my gold, and deserted me and

my kit, when she had secured it. Oho! but I hunted her down to death, though, and after they had buried her thinking to cheat me out of my vengeance, I dug her up and secured my trophy. Ha! ha! the Dwarf's enough for 'em—the dwarf's enough for 'em!"

Red Hatchet's eyes sparkled with enthusiasm.

"Dwarf big heap brave," he said. "Red Hatchet once great brave, but his limbs no longer strong for war-path. He can only meditate vengeance upon his enemies, instead of performing it."

"Red Hatchet should get Old Scavenger to strike for him. When he strikes he strikes to avenge."

"Red Hatchet has no gold, or he would readily pay the Dwarf Avenger to add notches to his council-pole in yonder town."

"Ha! ha! it is not money I want. I have gold in plenty. But I saw a jewel belonging to Red Hatchet, that I would wade through fire or blood to possess—ay! I'd depopulate yonder town until not a pale-face dog remained to usurp Red Hatchet's rights!"

"If the Devil Dwarf will do this, Red Hatchet will give him his daughter—if it is to her the pale-face refers."

"To her and none other. Swear to give the girl to me, to do with as I please, and I will agree that for every person now in yonder town, a death notch shall be made."

"Red Hatchet agrees. When he can count the death notches of all his sworn enemies, and is free to go back to his once pretty village, he will deliver Siska to the Devil Dwarf to do with as he pleases."

"Then call the girl. We will tap a vein in her arm, and seal this compact with a draught of her blood!" the avenger said.

And an hour later the act was carried out to the letter.

Death Notch was doomed!

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGERS SING.

HANK SHAKESPEARE was one of the ruling spirits of Death Notch, inasmuch as he was the bully over all, and always ripe for a quarrel or a spree.

One by one he had worsted each of the residents of the town, down to the captain, Piute Dave, in a fair and square fight, and that fact had by no means lessened his esteem of his own prowess, so that he was never backward about waltzing right into a quarrel.

His word, next to that of Piute Dave, was regarded as law, and the majority of the roughs would have followed him in case of a split, rather than the captain, who was of even a worse disposition than his bull-dog companion, for he was ever too ready to draw a weapon and shoot down a fellow at little or no offense.

Therefore when Shakespeare proposed to have a concert from the newly-arrived songsters, no one offered demur thereat, because to arouse the ire of the burly bullwhacker, was to give the signal for a fight, "from the word go."

Therefore after supper, a gang headed by the festive Shakespeare, who had imbibed more "bootlegs" than was good for accurate locomotion, made a precipitate descent into the Poker House, and ordered up the drinks, while the poet with his "smile" in hand, mounted the deal table nearest the bar, and addressed the uncouth assemblage around him:

"Feller-citizens! Noble representatives of the moral town o' Death Notch! It becomes my duty ter rise in front o' ye like a bellerin' buffler bul ter make an announcement. Ay, my noble guzzlers, I've a great bit o' news fer ye. We're on ther eve o' a great event. We have in our midst a human phenomenon—as Shakespeare, Sr., sed:

'A maiden fair wi' voice like a dream-er,

She sings an' she plays—she's a reg'lar screamer.'

Yes, ye long-eared pilgrims, yer umble sarvint has jest made the diskivery thet Sara Bernhardt Nilson, the famous singer is hyar in

Death Notch—she who has appeared afore all ther crowned heads o' Europe an' Ethiopia.

"An' what d'ye think, my noble councilmen and tax-payers? What d'ye surmise this distinguished singist purposes ter do? Why! thunderation, sirs! she calculates ter give our critical city o' Death Notch ther death shake, an' not open her vocal bugle short o' Hell-ener. Now, then, my prickly pears o' ther desert, I rise to promulgate ther extemporaneous question—aire we ter be snubbed like this? Aire we to be cheated out o' heerin' ther singist vocalize in our own aristocratic sphere? I say no!—In clarion notes I scream nay! Sum immortal poet in past ages hez sed werry skientifically—

'It pleases mortal man ter feast—

Musick alone ter soothe ther savage beast;'

an' hyar's ther very beast as requires music ter annoint ther ragged volcanic edge o' his erupted buzzom. What d'ye say, galoots—shall we invite ther gal ter favor us wi' some o' her fust class tunes?"

A cheer was the answer.

The idea was favored by all that rough assemblage.

"Then will I fetch forth ther great warbler from her conservatory!" the bullwhacker cried, and leaping from the table, and drawing a pair of revolvers, he left the room.

Up the stairs two steps at a time, he went and rapped at the door of Miss Verner's room, peremptorily.

The young woman opened it, in great surprise, her face paling as she saw the great gaunt bullwhacker.

"Scuse me, mum," he said, bowing, "but ye see ther b'yees hev found out thet ye're a singist, an' they allow thet ther likeliest thing ye kin do is ter come down an' sing fer 'em. They're dead fer music, an' tho, they're rubber a rough lot, ef ye sing yer purtiest, an' ther nigger too, I opine you'll be all right."

"Oh! sir, you must excuse me," Virgie cried, in distress. "I cannot sing, to-night—really I cannot."

"But ye must, mum. Ye see how ther boys aire all on ther *squi vive* ter heer ye vocalize, an' app'inted me as a delegate ter represent 'em an' say ef ye don't waltze down an' sing fer 'em, I am ter shoot ye on ther spot. Ye perseeve we're old business, we daisies o' Death Notch; when a mule gits balky we allus drap him, wi'out any preliminary parley; tharfore, we allow thet ef ye edify us wi' a few songs, an' the nigger, too, yer safety will be an assured fact, an' ef ye don't, we'll hev ter speak fer a parson ter preach yer funeral sermon, ter-morrer."

"Oh! Nic, what shall we do?" Miss Verner said, turning to the darky, pale and trembling. "What shall we do?"

"Spec's de bestest t'ing we can do is to gub 'em some music, rather dan git de top of our heads blowed off. Bress dis yar chile ef he's gwine to git in trouble, when de banjo will git him out. Jes' you git youh gittar, Miss Virgie, an' I'se a raccoon if we can't stir 'em up."

"Perhaps you are right, Nic, but I wish we had never come here!" the girl said, as she procured a handsome guitar from her trunk, and then she and the darky, who was armed with a banjo, followed the bullwhacker down the stairs into the crowded bar-room.

A loud cheer greeted their advent, from the ruffian assemblage, among whom were many of the most bold and lawless desperadoes on the border—men who had waded in crime and ruffianism all their lives, and had lost all sense of manliness or feeling, further than for their own gratification.

"Hyar's ther stage, mum!" Shakespeare said, indicating the bar-counter. "Shall I help ye up?"

"You need not trouble yourself," Virgie replied, stepping upon a chair, thence upon a table, and then to the bar, where three chairs had been placed.

Nicodemus followed, and likewise the bullwhacker, Shakespeare, who had evidently assumed the self-appointed position of master of ceremonies, for he arose when the two singers

were seated, and glanced his audience over, with an important "ahem!" as if to call attention to the fact that he was the central figure of the forthcoming entertainment.

"Feller-citerzens," he began, "this is an awe-inspiring and sublime occasion, when with swelling bosom of pride, I am enabled to present for your approval ther stars of two countries, Europe and Africa, consolerdated inter one stupendous aggravation. Et does me proud, my noble pack o' guzzlers, ter represent this great phalanx o' talent, and in commemoration o' this great occasion my poetical brain hath conceived a versical offering, which I beg leave ter precipitate at ye, as a prelude o' ther catwauling immediately ter foller. Et is entitled 'Ther B'iled Shirt,' an' was founded on true incerdents."

Then clearing his throat the bullwhacker laid one hand dramatically across his breast and began:

"Et war six years ago ter-day
When Deadwood, furst, thar struck,
A tender-fut from Jarsey Cit',
Togged out in spotless duck.
Oh! ye bet he war a gallus pill!
But ov money, run a-muck!

He waltzed inter ther 'Flush,' ker-slap—
Ther 'Flush' war squar fer deal,
Tho' thar war sum who sed thet Pete
War up ter sundry steal.
But I could never quite believe,
Thet Pete would stoop ter 'feel,'

Down by their board ther 'tender' sat;
I see'd 'twer desprit in his eye,
As on his snow-flake kids he spat
An' sed—"Wi' me it's rocks or—die!"
An' tho' no pig-tail cuss war he
I thort o' poor Bill Nye.

Sez he ter Pete—his words war low—
"Old pards, I'm broke—I hev no 'dirt';
But I'm so dry—give me a show—
Jest go a V. ag'in' my shirt—
Et's b'iled an' clean, so don't be mean;
Ter lose et, would my feelin's hurt."

The keerds was split upon ther 'put'
An' dealt—the tender he war low,
Fer Pete he held an orful hand,
An' scooped his jags o' ev'ry show.
He raked a trick
Fer every throw.

We laid the tender-fut ter rest;
O' arsenic he'd tuck a bowl;
He lost ther b'iled shirt from his breast,
An' then hed sought another goal.
We did ther 'white,' ye see, at best—
We clucked him in a 'prospect hole!'"

A tremendous cheer greeted the conclusion of the bullwhacker's recitation, for the sentiment of the rude effusion hit the rough audience in a tender spot. Any man guilty of wearing a b'iled shirt, had no sympathy from them, no matter what his troubles.

"Now we'll hear from the nigger!" Shakespeare said, jumping down from his counter, among the crowd. "After ther nigger, the gal."

"I'se no niggah, sah!" Nicodemus retorted, arising and glaring down at his audience. "I'se Nicodemus Johnsing, a cullud gentleman."

This elicited a roar of laughter, but when the darky took hold of the banjo and began to 'pound' it in a wonderfully scientific manner, accompanying the music with burlesque songs, he held his audience spellbound.

No such banjo playing had they ever heard or seen, for he would toss the homely instrument and catch it again without interrupting the current of his playing, and besides his songs were laughable and original absurdities, well rendered.

Encore after encore greeted his artistic efforts, and each time he responded with something a little better.

It was during the darky's playing that the door opened and a new-comer strode into the room.

A murmur of "The Captain" and "Piute Dave" passed among those who noticed his entrance, and several nodded to him, and then toward Miss Vernon, who sat beside her sable companion, with a pale face, and eyes that flashed with indignation at being thus forced to serve as a staring block for a crowd of ruffians, who had neither pity nor respect for womankind.

Piute Dave was fully on a par with his townsmen, as far as being villainous-looking was concerned. He was a tall, heavy-set man of some five-and-thirty years, and looked like one whom it would be hard to handle, in a struggle.

In face he was dark, bloated and sinister, with shaggy brows, cold gray eyes of evil expression, a sensual mouth shaded by a bristling black mustache, and a thick neck and chin, the latter ornamented with a slight goatee.

He was attired in knee-boots, light-colored trousers, red shirt open at the throat, corduroy jacket, and wide rimmed hat, while a belt about his waist contained a brace of handsomely trimmed revolvers.

He paused not far from the door, and with his hands thrust in his pockets, fixed his gaze upon the girl upon the bar—a gaze intense in its evil significance.

Virgie felt it, by some instinct, and turned to glance at the man—met the gaze, and then shudderingly averted her eyes.

Terrible to her, though, were the glances of the others, the eyes of this man sent a thrill of horror through her being. She felt that in him she had a designing villain to cope with—and she was not wrong.

Piute Dave was a villain—a fierce, self-willed ruffian, who hesitated at no dark and terrible deed that would further his purpose. More than one of those who had come to Death Notch to avoid Judge Lynch's noose, had fallen by his hand, for a trivial offense, and there was not a man in the town who did not stand in fear of him, even including the poetical Shakespeare.

After his singing nearly a dozen different comic songs, the audience seemed to grow tired of Nicodemus, and a call was made for the girl to sing.

"Yes, gal, let's heer frum you," the bullwhacker ordered, rubbing his hands together, greedily. "You're ther very nightingale w'at our ears acheth to hear. Give us a sorter o' Methodist Church tune—suthin' what'll make us feel solemncolly, like. As my late lamented namesake, Shakespeare, has been known on several occasions to remark:

'Ketch a bird on ther wing,
And force it ter sing,
An' all in gud time,
You'll hev music sublime.'"

Virgie saw that there was nothing left for her to do but to comply with the demand of her rough audience, as she was alone, with the exception of Nick, among strangers, and without defense.

She had already made up her mind to get through the concert as best she could, and afterward attempt to escape from the town.

Therefore, tuning her guitar, which was a fine-toned instrument, she selected a ballad from her repertory, entitled—"My Dear Old Mother's Face," and sung it through in a sweet, pathetic voice.

Every man in the room stood in utter silence as though spellbound, until she had finished, when there was a tremendous outburst of applause. Rude and uncouth though the auditors, they could but appreciate the beautiful song, heartily.

"Hip! hip! hooray! three jeers for ther bar schangled spanner! bow! wow! wow!" at this juncture bellowed Bulldog Ben, elbowing forward from the vicinity of a temporary bar, where he had been imbibing numerous "boot-legs." "Thet war splendiferous, old gal, thet war—a reg'lar old hymn right frum Halifax, barketh I, Bulldog Benjamin, ther majestic mastiff o' Death Notch. Sweeter by far than ary essence o' eslysium war thet old song about my old mother. I can now see her s'archin' fer her inebriate son, along ther shady banks o' ther Mississippi, you bet, an' ef evyer I did a noble act in my life I'm goin' ter kiss yer fer remindin' ther Bulldog of his old mam—bow! wow! wow! barketh I!"

And the ruffian bounded nimbly upon the bar! Virgie sprung to her feet with a cry of horror, but before the wretch could lay a hand upon her there was the sharp crack of a revolver, and he fell, bleeding, at her feet.

CHAPTER IV.

DEADWOOD DICK'S DOOM.

It had taken less time to end the life of the ruffian than it has to relate the occurrence, for the bullet entering his heart, he had expired almost as soon as he dropped.

For a moment afterward you could have heard a pin drop in the great bar-room of the Poker House, so great was the intensity of the silence caused by the shooting.

Then came words to the hearing of all—words, in a strange shrill voice, whose significance was plain to all within the room, except Virgie and Nick—

"Oho! Death Notch 47, and still the spirit of Red Hatchet calls for vengeance. Piute Dave shall count seventy, and Deadwood Dick five more. Ha! ha!"

Then there was a strange wild peal of laughter without the tavern, that chilled the blood of every one who heard it, so fearfully suggestive of a demon's triumph it was.

Not a man within the tavern made a move to discover the author of the laugh-infernal and of Bulldog Ben's death.

Even Piute Dave's swarthy visage assumed a grayish pallor, as he heard the words of the avenger, and he moved not from his tracks.

Shakespeare, the poetical bullwhacker, was the coolest man in the house, and that among men who were habitually hard-hearted and possessed of a sort of brute courage on such occasions.

"Pop goes ther weasel, an' thar'll be another notch on the council-pole!" he observed, dragging the body of Bulldog Ben upon his shoulder and dumping it in an obscure corner of the room.

"Bulldog's gone on his last long canine circuit, an' I allow I'll hev ter compose a doggeral on his kerflumex, or an epidemic for his tomb stone. How'd this be, fer instance:

"Poor Bulldog Ben, he barked, and then—
He jumped the bar, accordin';
Thar waz a shot—Ben tuk ther pot,
And anteed over Jordan."

But the poet did not get an *encore* on this effusion, inasmuch as his auditors were in no humor for anything but strong prose.

"Enough of this nonsense," Piute Dave said, striding forward. "Don't you see that you are all offering yourselves as targets for this secret avenger, whoever he may be? I'll take charge of the girl myself, an' ye can do as ye want with the nigger. Come, young woman—there's room fer sech a party one as you at my cabin, an' you're mine."

"Oh! no! no! I cannot, will not go with you!" Virgie cried, clinging to Nick, in tears and despair. "Please let us alone, sir! We are two strangers to all of you, and all we ask is to leave this place unmolested."

"Can't help that, girl. Piute Dave don't often take a second look at a gal, but when he does, he invariably has her, ef he wants her. So you might as well tumble down from that bar and waltz along wi' me at once, fer I allow I'm boss of this town—an' things hes allus got ter go to suit my notion!"

"But, jes youh look a-yar, now, sah!" cried Nicodemus, drawing himself to full height, and striking a dramatic pose, with uplifted arm.

"Youh surely forget de culimnating fact dat dis yar lady am my protegee, an' I'se swear'd by de plant's in de heabens to purtect her wid de las' drop ob my royal blood—yas, sah—dem's 'mighty trufes, sah, an' if you lay a fumb on dis yar young lady's pussom, I'll draw de razzor from my bootleg an' cut youh wide open—yas I will, fo' suah! Oh! I'se bad, when I'se shampooed—I'se a wade—an,—butcher barber, sah!"

"Ho! ho!" Piute Dave laughed, hoarsely. "If it wasn't fer frescoin' Poker Jack's floor wi' yer black gore, I'd blow your brains out, you black cuss. Come, girl! aire ye goin' ter somersault down from that bar, or shall I come an' help ye?"

"Oh! spare me—spare me, sir. Oh! my God, is there no one here to help me?" the poor girl sobbed.

"Nary a durned galoot, my gal!" Piute Dave declared, with a triumphant chuckle. "As I allowed, before, I'm boss o' this burg, an' thar ain't a man hyar as durst lift a hand to help ye, when I'm around."

"You lie, you brute! and if you but lay a hand on that girl, I'll bore a hole in your thick skull!" a voice suddenly cried.

The owner of the voice was Deadwood Dick!

While Piute Dave was speaking, he had quietly slipped into the room, and now stood mounted upon a chair, but a few paces in the former's rear, with a pair of cocked 32's in his grasp.

Piute Dave wheeled with a frightful oath, as he heard the words, with his hands upon the butts of his own revolvers, but he desisted from drawing them when he saw that his new opponent had the drop.

"Who are you!" he demanded, savagely, "and what d'ye mean by meddling in my business?"

"I mean that if you offer that girl the least molestation, I'll make you up into a perforated porous plaster quicker than a Dutchman can say beer!" the sportive Dick announced, with the utmost assurance and sang-froid.

"As to my dramatis personae, you may recognize me by the gentle and psalm-like title of Richard Harris, or Edward Harris, or Deadwood Dick, or any other name you like—Deadwood Dick being my pet titular appurtenance, when I'm wanted by the sheriff, and so forth and so forth."

"You Deadwood Dick?" Piute Dave exclaimed, in surprise; and he was not the only one to whom the noted title was apparently familiar.

"Yes, I am Deadwood Dick, the celebrated cuss from Custer clime—the diabolical devil-may-care devotee of road-agency, from Deadwood—the hunted hurricane, Harris, just as you see me. And according to a recent act of Congress, if you or any other two-legged individual attempts to harm yonder girl, whoever she may be, I'll agree to furnish him a free pass over Jordan by the most direct ethereal line. I mean business, so let some pilgrim of enterprising disposition open the market. Young lady, you may descend from the bar, and go to your room, or home. I'll agree to take care of any number of these cusses who may attempt to prevent you!"

"Go at your peril, girl!" Piute Dave growled, in a rage, watching a chance to draw a weapon. "Curses on you, boys, why don't you pull yer tools, and kill this devil's donkey?"

"Reckon we know our biz, boss," the bullwhacker, Shakespeare, declared, knowingly. "We allow our pelt is wuth jest as much per c-w-t. as yourn, an' we ain't in noways disposed ter venture a cruise in unknown regions, jost on account o' one ghal. As brother Byron aster say:

"Hang on ter terra firmer;
Tho' incumber'd bad wi' tax,
Et's cool an' very cumfetable,
As compared wi' Halerfax;
An' tho' beseege'd at ev'ry turn
Wi' mother-'n-laws an' maids,
Ye'll find et enough sight better
Than a good warm berth in Hades."

"You're cowardly dogs, every one o' you! Will you let one man bluff ye, when thar's forty o' ye to his one? Look, the girl is going to escape! A hundred dollars to the man who stops her!"

"I'll take it!" a ruffian shouted, and he leaped toward the bar, from which Virgie was about descending, to stop her.

"And you'll get it!" Dick cried, as he fired, then instantly returned the aim of his weapon to the crowd.

With scarcely a groan, the ruffian fell headlong to the floor—not dead, as was afterward proven, but stunned by the bullet grazing his skull.

A murmur of protest ran through the crowd, but not another hand was raised in opposition to the Dakotain's will. Piute Dave alone uttered a fearful oath.

"You see I hold the spotter, that trumps at every A. P.," Harris remarked. "When I

peregrinate into a town I always try to impress upon the minds of the citizens, first of all, the fact that I am able to clean out the hull town, single-handed, and able to stand up in defense of the weak and unprotected every day in a week, and as many times on Sunday as the hymn-book orders. There! the young lady has gone. Now, gents, what's the damage? I'm willing to settle. One tough laid out, and a broken window glass, besides a ruffle upon the personal pride of our friend here, Piute David. What's the expense, David?"

"Your life!" the captain cried, his rage in no wise diminished. "I'll cut your heart out."

"Oh! now, really, David, you would not rehearse the tragedy of David and Goliath, would you? You wouldn't amputate my pulsometer would you, just to satisfy your revengeful spirit?"

"Yes, curse you! But give me advantage of the 'drop' you've got, and I'll show you what kind of a man Piute Dave is."

"Indeed! I am to infer, then, that you are something like a concentrated volcano, done up in a dynamite torpedo, and when you're touched off you scatter death and destruction in the forty directions of a blizzard! I had no idea you were so ferocious, or I should have fainted, hours ago. Tell you what I'll do, though, David. If your thermometer indicates that your steam has attained such momentum that there is danger of your exploding, I'll give you a chance to work off a little of your superfluous wrath. You appear to be a pretty muscular chap and I flatter myself I have sufficient for usual cases of emergency. Therefore, we will clear the center of the room; you take a position at one end—I at the other. Then we will each start for each other, weaponless, and have a rough and tumble scuffle for the mastery—the winner to take the position as boss of the town—the loser to be given one hour to leave it, never to return, except under penalty of death by shooting, at sight. Now, then, how does that strike you?"

"I'll accept the proposition," Piute Dave said, with a horrid laugh. "It won't take me long to break your neck."

"Well, for your sake, I hope not," Dick retorted, with a smile. "First, however, I want to know that there will be no interference from the crowd—"

"I'll 'tend ter thet, young feller," Shakespeare declared. "I'll see thet everything goes squar'."

"I have a plan as fair for one as the other!" Piute Dave said, a villainous glitter in his evil eyes. "A few rods up the gulch is a bottomless bed of quicksand. The weight of a man will sink him there in five minutes, forever out of sight, and nothing he can do can help him when once he is in it; it has gulped down many a dead body an' some live ones, too, so it's jest the hole for a death-struggle. I propose that we go to the edge of this treacherous pocket, and the man who is strong enough to throw his opponent into it shall be the victor, while the victim shall be left to sink in the sand to his death."

"That suits me, exactly," Deadwood Dick responded. "As soon as the man is thrown into the pocket, the spectators shall march away, chanting his death requiem. Is this perfectly understood?"

"I understand. I allow ther boys does," Piute Dave grunted.

"On course we do!" declared the loquacious bullwhacker poet. "Jest as soon as one or t'other o' yer is kerflopped inter thet death's hole, we're ter start pell-mell fer ther Poker House an' moisten our bugles, perparatory ter singin' ther Death March o' Solomon!"

"Correct! Let's adjourn to the field of action," Deadwood Dick said. "I came here expecting to run into difficulty, and I'm not the chap to turn tail and back out because of a slight unpleasantness. By the way, if any of you fellows know any thing favorable of this big loater Pa suggest that now will be a good time to recall them before we plant him;

after he is dead and gone you'll not care to remember him."

Piute Dave made a move to draw a weapon, but saw that Deadwood's dauntless representative was still on guard, and so desisted.

"Come! no funny business, now," Dick ordered, "but lead the way if you want to furnish me a sepulcher of quicksand. I'm anxious to know who is going to draw the prize in this lottery."

Piute Dave led the way from the tavern, Deadwood Dick went next; then the bullwhacker poet and his uncouth associates brought up the rear, in single file.

A strange looking procession they made as they thus marched down the street, under the light of a soaring full moon.

Virgie Verner saw them from the window of her room, and wondered what was going to happen.

"They are going to hang the brave fellow who came to my rescue!" she gasped, in horror. "God forbid!"

Down the street to the western terminus of the town Piute Dave piloted the way, and they soon came to a dark-looking verdureless spot that every experienced eye knew to be a quicksand pocket that it was sure and inevitable death to touch.

This was the place of struggle.

Deadwood Dick threw off his jacket, to one side, and deposited his weapons upon it.

Piute Dave gave his revolvers to the bullwhacker, but did not remove his coat, evidently not deeming it necessary.

The two men then walked ten paces in opposite directions, turned, and at the word "Go!" given by one of the bystanders, rushed to meet each other.

It was not until they were within arm's reach, that Deadwood Dick discovered that the ruffian had a small dagger in his grasp.

Too late!

They clinched and struggled, and the blade entered Dick's left arm rendering it perfectly powerless.

With the advantage thus gained, it was quick work for Piute Dave to raise his adversary and hurl him forward into the mire of the bottomless bed of quicksand!

Then, with victorious shouts, the rough crowd strode away, and Deadwood Dick sunk gradually into the yielding sand, to his horrible doom.

CHAPTER V.

\$500 REWARD; AND "CALAMITY" ON DECK.

ON returning to the Poker House from their moonlight excursion to the remarkable duel, these wild men of Death Notch found that they had another stranger, still, in their midst—the individual once before described as Carol Carner.

He had ridden into the place, registered and put up at the Poker, and was just engaged in tacking up a placard against the wall, as the crowd swarmed in, headed by victorious Piute Dave, and his right hand man, the bullwhacker.

Poker Jack's face bore rather a disappointed expression, when he saw that Piute had come back in place of Deadwood Dick. He had hoped and expected it would be the other way, for though there was no declared warfare between them, they hated each other cordially, and calculated that the quickest man at pulling a 'pop' would eventually be the death of the other. Which one it remained to be told.

The man, Carner, went on tacking up his placard, and when he had finished, stepped back to inspect his work.

The placard was a press-printed poster, in big type, and bore the following announcement:

"\$500 REWARD!

"The above reward will be paid for the capture and delivery to the undersigned, of a wandering girl calling herself Virginia Verner, but whose real name is Myrtle Morris. She is accompanied by a negro companion, and is wanted for the crime of murder.

"CAROL CARNER, Guardian."

Piute Dave read the notice over and over, and then took a good look at the man who had posted it.

"I allow ye won't be apt ter find yer gal, hyer, Cap!" he said gruffly. "We don't allow of no petticoaters in this hyar town."

"Oh! you don't," Carner said, with imperturbable composure. "Well, it won't do no harm to advertise, and make sure. Indeed, I am pretty positive the girl is in this town."

"D'ye mean thet?" Piute demanded, angrily drawing a pistol. "Et ain't healthy for any pilgrim to doubt the word of Piute Dave."

"Experience has taught me not to believe any man till I've tested him," was the unflinching answer. "My sentiment applies no more to you than to the rest. If you gents ever indulge, you'll find I have an open account at the bar."

"Drink, stranger? Waal, I should cough up a cat!" exclaimed the disciple of Shakespeare, executing a hop-skip-and-jump. "Ef eveyer a thirsty throng o' theologians thrived in this terrible kentry, we're ther ones. Drink? On course we will; bootlegs an' eye-openers by ther dozen will we dispense in honor of meetin' ye, at yer expense, an' don't ye fergit it, nuther. Waltz up, thirsty pilgrims, an' inundate yer desert waists wi' prime old 'rib-tickler.' Irrigate your parched an' arid systems wi' ther ambrosial nectar o' s. d. f. r.—sure death at forty rods. As ther immortol Shakespeare used ter remark:

"A 'gilt-edge' jest before breakfast,
A sealskin' yer dinner ter settle,
A horn-an'-a-alf, before supper,
An' a 'night-cap' ter put on yer mettle."

"Drink, stranger? On course we will, an' I'll take a good straight 'coffin-nail,' fer mine, wi' a bumble-bee or a wassup in it, to give et life!"

And they did drink, to a man, with the exception of Piute Dave, who gruffly refused.

Watching his opportunity he left the bar-room, unnoticed, and went up-stairs. At the door of Virgie's room he knocked softly—more like a woman's knock it was, than that of a man.

"Who is there?" Virgie asked, from within, in a tone whose accents betokened alarm. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Sh! I am a stranger to you, but if you value your personal safety, open the door!" the villain answered in a feigned voice; then, as he heard her unlock the door, he chuckled to himself to see how cleverly he had succeeded, until—

The door partly opened, and he found Virgie standing in the aperture with a cocked revolver in her hand.

"I thought it was you," she said with more composure than she had yet manifested. "Now that you are here, you villain, what do you want?"

"You're devilish independent, all at once!" Piute Dave said, in surprise.

"Because I've got the drop on you!" Virgie retorted. "I find that he's best who gets aim first, in this delectable country, and accordingly, I'm ready for you, sly as you were. What do you want, I say?"

"I want to come in. I've important news for you. There's a man down stairs who wants ye, at about five dollars a pound!"

Virgie gave a gasp, and her face turned pale.

"Who?" she demanded, though she could have told without asking.

"Let me come in, if you want to know," Piute Dave said, grimly. "Awhile ago ye spurned the friendship of yours truly; now, mebbe, with a wolf howling upon yer scent, ye'll be glad ter accept of it."

"Between the bite of a wolf and a rattle-snake, I have no choice!" Virgie retorted, decisively, "and therefore, if you have anything to communicate, you can do it from where you are, or not at all."

"Curse you! Then you prefer surrendering to the man down-stairs, rather than accept of my protection, eh?"

"I shall not surrender, nor accept your protection!" Virgie responded. "If I am attack-

ed, I shall fight till I see that there is no hope, and then kill myself!"

"Pooh! words are cheap! Listen, and I'll tell you what is the most likely thing fer ye to do, as things now stand. This enemy o' yours, who calls himself Carrol Carner, don't know, yet, thet you're heer, an' ther boys knows their biz, an' won't give it away, as long as I say nay. Now, jest you marry me, an' I'll go down an' slit your enemy's weazand, an' that'll put an end ter the matter. See?"

"I comprehend your magnanimous offer, but emphatically decline. When in need of a husband, I shall select a man—not a wolf, in the guise of man. You may inform Carrol Carner of my presence here, if you like, and tell him, also, that I have been taking daily practice with the revolver, lately, and I shall take advantage of the first opportunity to blow his brains out. Go, now, or I'll open up practice on you. Go! I say; I mean biz!"

And judging by the flash of her eyes, he concluded she was in dead earnest, and took as few steps as possible to carry him out of range of her weapon.

Baffled and savage, he descended the stairs to the street, to cool off his passion—and consider.

Villain that he was, he had set his heart on capturing the girl, and making her his wife, and the failure just now but strengthened his determination.

Carrol Carner, although he failed to obtain any information from Piute Dave concerning the object of his search, was in no wise discouraged, and made it his business, during the evening, to 'pump' nearly all the roughs in the saloon, who, taking the cue from Dave, all denied any knowledge of the girl. This very unanimity strengthened his suspicions.

"Excuse me, please, if I refuse to believe you," he said, coolly. "So positive has been the declaration that the girl is not here, that I am sure she is here. I demand to see your register. When I registered to night, I neglected to look it over to see if there had been any previous arrivals."

"I refuse to let you see the register," Poker Jack replied, an ugly flash in his eye as he went on: "I'll own up that the girl is here, and when you attempt to take 'er away, you're a dead man—you, or any other two-legged cuss in the town. I've been watchin' the way things aire shapin', ter night, an' I allow that the gal is pure, an' good, an' tho' I ain't anything to brag on about bein' a saint, I allow thar's enough man left in me ter shove for'a'd six, ef ary galoot tries any gum games about that gal. An' my name's Poker Jack, from Pioche."

And the landlord of the Poker House brought his fist down hard, on the bar.

That night, when Death Notch slumbered, a horseman rode stealthily into the town.

His form was well wrapped in a long black cloak, a wide-rimmed black hat was slouched down over his forehead to the eyes, which were covered, with the exception of a pair of peep holes, by a black mask, which was in turn met by an immense black beard that touched to the man's waist, all giving him a dark and sinister appearance.

That his mission was a secret one was evident, for his animal's hoofs were carefully muffled, and made little or no noise as they struck the hardpan bottom of the gulch.

The strange dark man rode slowly along until he came opposite the Poker House, when he reined his horse close up to the front of the building and halted.

Rising in the stirrups, and thence to his horse's back, he was able to climb upon the cap of the front door frame, which he accordingly did, and then crept into the open window, which led into the upper hall.

Pausing a few moments and listening intently, he stole from one door to another along the hall, and repeated the precaution of listening, nor did he conclude until he had visited every door that opened off from the hall.

Then he came back to the door of the apartment occupied by Virgie, and softly turned the knob."

The door being locked, refused to open, at which he did not appear to be much surprised, for he drew a long slender pair of "nippers" from his pocket and quickly had the door unlocked and open.

Then, stealing softly into the room, he closed it behind him as quietly as he had opened it.

The next morning when Poker Jack took the meals up-stairs for Miss Virgie Verner, before any customers were about the establishment to watch him, he found the door wide open and Miss Verner gone.

Not a little surprised he opened the communicating door of the darky's apartment, and found the gent of color lying upon his bed, bound hand and foot and gagged, with a quilt thrown over his head to shut out any sound he might make.

Poker Jack immediately went to his rescue, and found the poor "coon" nearly suffocated.

As soon as he could gain his breath, he gave vent to a sigh of relief, and gazed about him with ludicrously rolling eyes, to make sure that he was really once more liberated.

"Oh! de good Lor' a'mighty! I s'pected I'se a gone clam, fo' suah!" was his exclamation. "W'at's de matter, boss—w'at's de reason dis inoffensive chile is tied up like a lump ob dry goods an' a quilt frowed ober his head fo' to keep him from breafin'—dat's what I'se anxious to know?"

"Well, being somewhat in the dark myself, I naturally looked to you for an explanation," the host of the Poker House replied. "Don't you know how you came in that plight?"

"Deed I don't know nuffin' 'bout it, boss. All I know is dat when I awoke, dar I was fast, like de leg ob a clam in a shell, and wid a great scarcity o' breathin' stuff. Dun'no nuffin' else about it—'deed I don't, fo' suah."

"Well, this is kind o' funnysome," Poker Jack declared, scratching his head. "Some one's been hyar durin' the night, an' waltzed off with ther gal—that's certain."

"What, Miss Virgin gon' d'ye say?" Nicodemus cried in alarm, springing to his feet, his dark visage growing a shade paler, if, indeed, such a thing is possible.

"I allow she is," Jack replied. "Leastwise she ain't in her room."

"Oh! de good Lor' a'mighty. W'at's to become of me, den? I'se a dead gone nigger, fo' suah! Say, boss, maybe she's got skeered an' done gon' hid under de bed, or in de wash stand, or—"

"Not a bit of it. She's bin smuggled off during the night, but the next thing is, who's the smuggler? I allow et won't be healthy for him, when I learn who."

Had Jack had any inclination to keep the matter hushed, he could not well have done so, for it wasn't ten minutes before Nicodemus had spread the news all over the town.

Both Carrol Carner and Piute Dave swore roundly when they heard the news, but Poker Jack eyed them searchingly.

"One or the other of you know where that gal is," he said, to himself, "and if no one else is interested in her welfare, it shall not be said that Poker Jack left her to the mercy o' two worse brutes than himself!"

That day a horseman, or rather a girl, dressed in male attire, drew rein before the Poker House, and slipping from the saddle, she strode into the bar-room, and took a glance over the crowd, therein.

The woman was the notorious free-and-easy, reckless waif of the rocky western country—Calamity Jane!

CHAPTER VI.

A VERY SINGULAR PERFORMANCE.

FEW there were in Death Notch who had not heard of the notorious girl, and several among the lot had seen, and now recognized her, Poker Jack among the rest, for Poker had formerly thrived in Deadwood, before coming in Pioche, and Death Notch.

Calamity had changed but little since the time when this pen last introduced her; she was the same graceful, pretty girl-in-breeches that she had always been, but if there was any change it was in the sterner expression of her sad eyes.

A murmur of "Calamity Jane," ran through the bar-room as she entered, proving that she was recognized by more than one.

"Yes, Calamity Jane!" she retorted. "I see I am not unknown even in this strange place. Better, perhaps, is it so, for you'll have a clearer idea of whom you have to deal with. I want to know where Deadwood Dick is—that's what I want. I allow ye'll say he ain't here, but I won't swallow that. He told me he'd be here, over a week ago, an' he allus keeps his dates."

"An' so you are wantin' him, eh?" Piute Dave grunted, from his perch on one end of the bar. "S'pose likely you're a pard o' his'n, eh?"

"I allow I've been his truest pard for many a year," Calamity replied, "but, that's not what I was asking. Where is Deadwood Dick?"

"Well, gal, ef my memory serves me right, I allow the last I see'd o' him he was a-sinkin' in a bed of quicksand, where I throwed him. We had a tussel, an' ther best man was ter chuck t'other 'un in the quicksand, an' ther honor fell onter me. He weakened, and I give him a boost, an' I presume ef he's kept right on sinkin', ever since he's arriv' down ter ther maiden kentry o' the washee-washee, by this time."

Calamity's heart sunk within her at this declaration, but outwardly she was very calm.

She had met Deadwood Dick in the lower mining districts, a few weeks before, and he had said, as he took her hand in his, in parting:

"I'm going up to Death Notch, Janie, on my last adventuresome trail, and after that I'm going to settle down for good, in some lonely spot, and see if the remainder of my life cannot be passed in more peace and quiet than the past has been. Come to me, at Death Notch, Calamity, and the hand you have so long sought shall be yours. We will go hence down the avenue of life, hand in hand, together as man and wife."

And then he had kissed her good-by, and she had looked forward eagerly for the appointed time to come when she should go to claim the love and protection of the only man she had ever worshiped.

"I don't believe a word that you say," she said, in reply to Piute's brag. "But if I learn that what you have said is true, look out for yourself, for, girl though I am, I'll make you pay a bitter penalty for your deed."

Then she turned and left the Poker House, a feeling of sadness stealing over her.

She soon by inquiry learned the location of the fatal quicksand, and the incidents of the strange struggle between Piute Dave and Deadwood Dick; then, leaving her horse to graze, she walked out to the place where the pool of stagnant water covered the treacherous bog-mire of death.

"Oh! Dick! Dick!" she moaned, kneeling upon the ground, and peering into the pool, as if to penetrate into the untold depths; "I cannot—will not believe that you have met your death in this awful place. Somebody, perhaps, may have come along and rescued you, at the last moment. God knows I wish I could credit that supposition. Dead—you dead, my brave, true friend? No! no! no! I will never believe it—never, until when my own life shall have ebbed out, and I find that my search for you has been fruitless."

Tears were strange things in the eyes of Calamity Jane; it was more in her nature to laugh at trouble than cry; but, now, everything was changed. She had never quite given up the hope that Dick would, at some distant day, recognize her devotion to him, and take her as a wife. When he had told her to come to Death Notch to become his wife, the bitterness of her strange young life had

seemingly melted into glorious sunshine, and she was happy.

Little wonder, then, that bitter grief now returned to torture her, when they told her that the famous bravo-knight had met so terrible a fate, after so many years of safe passage through constant peril.

For an hour she knelt by the dark pool. Her tears were now dried, and a deadly glitter in her eyes, while a stern expression mantled her features.

"No! I will not be rash enough to kill myself," she murmured, rising to her feet, "but will live on—live to hope that he is not dead—live to wreak vengeance on those who, as a people, aimed to tread upon and crush him, because—because he was Deadwood Dick!"

"Ha! ha! ho! ho!" a voice laughed, just behind her, and she wheeled to behold the dwarf avenger, Old Scavenger, standing near. Dick had described him to her, and therefore she had no difficulty in recognizing him—for surely there were no two persons in the West whom nature had made so hideous.

"Ho! ho!" the dwarf chuckled, when she turned to gaze at him. "So you came to look for the devilish road-agent in that pool, eh? You don't find him, though—neither do I. Ho! ho! no; he cheated me out of my sweetest morsel of vengeance, curse him!"

"How so?" Calamity asked, in surprise. "Was not Deadwood Dick a friend to you and your daughter, Scavenger?"

"No! no! He was a traitor—a devilish traitor—the murderer of my child, and when I found that, pinned to her dress as she lay in death where he left her, I pronounced his doom, and that of every other white traitor. D'ye see that?"

And he held up the note that he had found on Kentucky Kit's body. (See HALF-DIME LIBRARY No. 201).

Calamity took it from his hands, and read it carefully.

"This is not Deadwood Dick's writing, nor his signature, old man," she said decidedly. "It is a forgery, trumped up to throw the suspicion on Deadwood Dick."

"Bah! you lie!" Scavenger roared, becoming suddenly furious. "You lie like all the rest. They all lie, steal and murder, and I hate 'em—hate you—hate every man or woman whose face is white. Ha! ha! I kill 'em too. Each day have I sworn to add one new death notch to Red Hatchet's council-pole, and you shall be my victim for to-day—you! you! Ha! ha! it will be sweet vengeance to kill the girl who loved the devil road-agent!"

And, even while speaking, he drew a long, keen-bladed butcher-knife from his belt, and bounded toward her, like some ferocious wild beast, rather than a human being.

Calamity sprang back a pace, and drew a revolver, for she saw that the insane Dwarf was bent on her destruction.

"Stand back or I'll fire!" she cried, but he heeded her not, and she was as good as her word—fired, once! twice! thrice! full at Old Scavenger's breast.

But, without appearing to mind the shots, he came on, madly, with upraised knife, and nothing was left for her to do but turn and run for her life, as her strange foe was evidently bullet proof.

She didn't run toward the town, but up the gulch, and as fast as her feet could carry her, for she was aware that it was now a matter of life or death to her.

Once, and again, she turned half about, while running, and sent an unerring shot at the Avenger, but they checked not his chase, and he laughed in defiance, brandishing his knife, threateningly.

And, too, he was a remarkably swift runner, and the Girl Sport soon became aware that he was slowly but surely gaining on her.

In the start-off, she had got several rods away from him, but it promised to be no great length of time ere he should overtake her.

Realizing this, Calamity began to wonder what she must do to escape. Could it be that she, too, had come to this unlucky town, only

to meet her fate, as Deadwood Dick had done?

Faster—faster grew the chase, both pursuer and pursued straining every nerve to win; nearer and nearer to his victim did the Avenger gain, a demoniac grin of triumph upon his features.

Suddenly, however, there was a change—a break in the monotony of the race.

A man stepped suddenly from behind a point of rock, into the gulch, just after Calamity had passed, and stood with folded arms facing the oncoming dwarf.

Not a weapon did he have in hand, nor seemed he prepared for a battle, yet faced the pursuing Avenger composedly.

Wrapt from head to foot in a long black cloak, and wearing a tremendous black beard, which, with the addition of a mask, and wide-rimmed black hat slouched down over his forehead, completely hid his features from view, he was a dark and rather sinister individual to behold—the same strange person who had ridden so mysteriously into Death Notch the night previous.

Nearer and nearer Old Scavenger approached, flourishing his knife, and making strange contortions, but not an inch did the Black Unknown move, further than to raise his black gloved hand, and point one finger at the Dwarf.

Had the stranger shown fight, there would have undoubtedly been an immediate struggle, but his queer action seemed to puzzle the crazed creature, and he came to a halt, a dozen yards away, seeming undecided whether to advance further toward the cloaked customer or not.

Calamity also halted on the other side of him, not a little surprised and curious.

The Black Unknown now turned toward her, and motioned her, with his outstretched hand, to approach.

The girl obeyed, keeping her weapon ready for instant use. When within a few feet of him, he motioned her to stop. Then turning to the Dwarf, he motioned him to pass by on the left-hand side of the gulch.

At first Scavenger made no move to obey, but when the stranger stamped his foot, imperatively, the girl's pursuer did as he had been motioned to do, nor paused until he stood where Calamity had first halted.

Now turning to Calamity, the dark stranger pointed toward the Death Notch, and said, in a deep tone of voice, the simple word—

"Go!"

"Kerect!" the Girl Sport replied, with a laugh. "I'm much obliged to you, and don't need a second invitation."

And she went down the gulch, wondering who was this black individual, with the voice like a roll of midsummer thunder. She looked around just before turning a slight bend that would hide them from view, and saw that both the Black Unknown and the Dwarf yet retained their same relative positions, except that the arm of the Unknown was leveled at the avenger, commandingly.

As she looked, too, she saw the hand and arm fall to the Unknown's side, while Scavenger staggered back—turned, and fled, up the gulch, at the top of his speed.

Calamity went back to the town, and registered at the Poker House, and was assigned the room from which Virgie Verner had been abducted.

"Jack," she said, to Poker Jack, who had shown her to it—"Jack, you were a hard fellow when I used to see you up in Deadwood, and judging by your surroundings, I don't allow you're much saintlier, now. But, that won't hinder you from answering me a question."

"Certainly not, Calamity; ask anything you choose!"

"Well, I want to know whether or not you really believe that Deadwood Dick sunk in that quicksand?"

"Why, I haven't any reason to believe that he did not. Piute Dave threw him in, they

say, and then he and the gang cum back here, an' left the poor cuss to sink."

"May the Almighty inflict some terrible penalty upon them if this is true! But, try though I do to become resigned to this conclusion, I do not believe that Deadwood Dick lies at the bottom of that bed of quicksand!"

Toward dusk, that evening, a woman, on horseback, attended by two mounted scouts, rode into Death Notch, and dismounted before the Poker House.

She was an elderly lady, say of fifty-five or sixty, well-dressed, and yet one whose face spoke of a life that had not been all sunshine.

On dismounting she immediately entered the bar-room, and after a searching glance around, approached Carrol Carner, who was engaged in playing a game of cards with a miner.

Carner arose, with a flushed face, as he saw her approach, as if it was his intention to attempt to escape, but he caught the gleam of something concealed in the woman's hand as it hung by her side, and desisted from any such action.

"I expected to find you, if I persevered," the woman said, with sarcasm, as he arose and tipped his hat. "Please order a private apartment where I can see you, and talk business!"

CHAPTER VII.

A VILLAIN UNMASKED.

CARNER seemed to deem it advisable to humor her, for he immediately led the way upstairs to his own apartment, and when there handed her a chair.

"Be seated," he said curtly. "Your visit is unexpected to me. Why do you come here?"

"To effect a settlement with you, villain that you are, if such a thing is possible," the woman retorted bitterly. "Carrol Carner, have you not one spark of tenderness or mercy in your cruel heart?"

"Not that I am aware of," the man replied, seating himself, with his heels elevated upon a table and lighting a cigar. "I never was overburdened with a reproving conscience, and when it is likely to interfere with any of my plans I do away with it entirely. If you come here thinking that wholesale tears and supplications for mercy will move me, you've greatly missed your reckoning."

"Carrol Carner, take care!"

"Bah! don't be so foolish as to threaten me, old woman! You can't do anything with me."

"I can. I can have you arrested for a big-amist!"

"Humph! How are you to prove it? How think you a court would decide it? They would pronounce me an adventurer, reprimand me perhaps, and there the matter would end. Why, I cannot see that there's any great cause for trouble! It's a simple little story. I, Carrol Carner, an adventurer, go down to California for a little recreation, and meet and marry the step-daughter of a rich speculator known as Morris. Both the girl's mother and step-father approve of the match, when I accommodate them with a little ready-made information that I am a popular mine owner in the Nor'-west—and the wedding goes off as merry as a marriage bell should go. Next in order develops a little item of family news that Morris has a deal of property and an equal number of debts, and in order to save his property he must deed it to some one, and thereby defraud his creditors of all that he owes. In this extremity, Morris proposes to deed me two-thirds of all his property, and his step-daughter the other third, all of which is done, legally, and thus things stand, when comes the news from Utah that Carrol Carner is a Mormon, and has no less than eight fair and buxom wives, to whose loving company he is respectfully invited back.

"There is a small-sized tornado in the Morris camp then, and Carner is commanded to clear out, but first deed back the property. This he kindly refuses to do; and about this time two other sensations arise. News comes that Myrtle, his wife, has inherited an immense fortune by death of a relative—next,

Carrol Carner, in company with a pair of neighbors, finds Myrtle kneeling over the lifeless body of her step-father, with a bloody knife in her grasp. What do you suppose is the result? I suppose you are full well aware. Caught in the act as it were, and realizing the consequences, Myrtle fled, not only from the scene of her strange crime, but from California, accompanied by a family servant. Smarting under the blow of dishonor she had put upon my fair name and reputation, I vowed to hunt her down and hand her over to the law!"

"Villain! monster!" Mrs. Morris gasped, who had been listening with blanched face and flashing eyes. "Your villainy is without parallel. You know my poor child never committed that murder. You know more about how Mr. Morris died than she."

"That you will find it a hard thing to prove," Carner replied, coolly. "It's easier to surmise a thing than to prove it. I can prove that I found the girl in a suspiciously murderous position, with a bloody knife in her grasp, and that is all-sufficient in the eyes of the law. When I succeed in capturing her, the law will take her."

"What! what is this—have you not found her yet?" the mother demanded, excitedly.

"Yes—on two occasions, but she has given me the slip both times," the scoundrel declared composedly. "I found her at first, fulfilling an engagement in a Leadville theater as Vergie Verner, where her musical accomplishments, together with those of the negro, had secured her a situation. She saw me, however, before I had ferreted her out, and fled. I was soon upon her trail, however, and followed her here to this beautiful burg. She was here when I came, but during last night was kidnapped from her room, and the darky left behind, bound hand and foot."

"And you were the kidnapper!" Mrs. Morris asserted. "Carrol Carner, for God's sake—for the hope of the hereafter, tell me where is my child?"

"Dead, I hope," the Mormon said, decidedly, "but even that is a delusion. I know nothing more than I have told you. I did not abduct her. I do not know where she is."

"You are lying to me!"

"Have it that way if you choose. I would it were so myself."

"Why have you thus turned against her, you villain, after you married her—deceived her and wronged her?"

"Because—well, for several reasons. One in particular—I don't need any more wives, having a pretty good stock up at Salt Lake. I only married the girl in the first place because I found life rather monotonous in California. Secondly, I find that with your demise and her demise, there are no more immediate heirs extant, and I would come in and inherit the last third of your property, and her recent inheritance too. Consequently, you see it is only natural that the law should deal promptly with her, while as for you—oh, well, it wouldn't puzzle one much to get rid of you!"

Exasperating in the extreme was the man's composure and *sang froid* as he spoke; it but gave evidence of his depravity.

"It is as I supposed," she said, rising. "You are disposed to win your little game, no matter what the risk. You will find, however, that a mother's love for her child is an insurmountable barrier to battle with."

"Ha! ha! then you will show your teeth, eh?" he said, with a light laugh.

"Ay! and you shall feel their bite if you further attempt to harm one hair of her head who is dearer to me than life."

Then she swept haughtily from the room.

"Humph! matters are getting a little more business like," the Mormon muttered. "If I mistake not I couldn't have chosen a better location to terminate the business."

Back from the plateau which had been the scene of the strange compact between Red Hatchet and Old Scavenger, stood a goodly-sized, strong-built log cabin, surrounded by a fringe of pine trees whose foliage reached to

the ground. So admirably arranged was this natural screen, it was only on close approach that the cabin could be seen.

About the same hour that Carrol Carner and Mrs. Morris were holding an interview, a scene was occurring in the mountain cabin, which has a bearing upon our romance.

Red Hatchet sat before a fire on the hearth, engaged in smoking his pipe, while he watched the flames leap upward, and at the same time listened to the words of Old Scavenger, who stood to one side, leaning upon a rude staff.

"Does Red Hatchet not remember what he promised?" the dwarf demanded angrily, a mad fire burning in his terrible eyes. "Have ye forgotten that ye gave her to me?"

"Red Hatchet gave not his child to the Dwarf Devil to butcher!" the chief replied, in a stern tone; "not till Scavenger has completed the destruction of the pale-faces' town, shall he lay hand upon Siska, and then, it shall not be to harm her. Siska can become the wife of Devil-Dwarf, but he must not harm her."

"Bah! I want not a wife—I want sweet vengeance!" the Avenger replied, with a wild laugh. "To-day has passed without my adding a death notch to the record. Every time I fail to secure a victim, I will cut off a finger or toe, so that they'll not have it to say I failed to have vengeance. Siska shall furnish me that trophy!"

"No! no!" Red Hatchet gasped—"you shall not do this, I will not permit it."

"Then does not Red Hatchet respect the vow he sealed with a draught of blood, that Siska should belong to me, to do with as I pleased? If he does not, I will kill him, and then torture the girl!" the maniac hissed venomously. "I will not be cheated of vengeance!"

The old chief bowed his head in his hands, for a few moments. Then, he said:

"Red Hatchet is the chief of a great tribe, and his word is good, whenever he gives it. The Devil-Dwarf shall have one of the fingers of Siska."

He arose and hobbled to the door of the cabin, which stood open, and taking a whistle from his pocket, blew a shrill blast upon it.

A moment later Siska came bounding merrily through the trees into the cabin, her dusky face flushed, from her mountain ramble.

She grew pale as she saw the Dwarf, and turned to her father.

"What is it Red Hatchet wants?" she asked, laying a hand upon his arm.

The chief gazed at her a moment irresolutely, then his face hardened, as he led her to a seat.

"Siska is a brave girl. Does she remember who it was that drove her people from Sequoy, and killed her brothers and mother?"

"The pale faces, father, who have ever been the enemies of the red race. But, why does Red Hatchet ask?"

"Does Siska remember being told that Scavenger, the Dwarf, had consented to fight the pale-faces for Red Hatchet, and that Siska was to be his? Did not Siska consent to this?"

"I consented, because I knew it was Red Hatchet's wish."

"True. Red Hatchet promised you to Scavenger, and now he asks for one of Siska's fingers, because he has not been successful in killing a pale-face. What has Siska to say? Will she refuse the sacrifice, or will she fulfill Red Hatchet's word of honor to the Dwarf?"

A horrified shudder traversed the Indian girl's frame, as she listened, and fixed her gaze upon the horrible hairy visage of the Avenger.

"Can Red Hatchet ask Siska to do this?" she demanded, turning her reproachful eyes upon his stern unpitying face.

"It pains Red Hatchet to ask for this sacrifice, and yet Siska knows that he has always kept his promises as good as the gold in these mountains. And, then, the Devil-Dwarf is carrying out the vengeance upon the pale-faces, which Red Hatchet's old age will not allow him to do."

"And if you refuse, I'll kill your father, and torture you, afterward," Scavenger said, with a diabolical grin.

"Oh! father, I cannot!" Siska cried, covering her eyes with her hands, to shut out sight of the crazy cut-throat. "I'd rather you would take your tomahawk, and kill me, yourself!"

"Waugh! Siska is but a squaw, now—not like her brave self. Lay one finger upon the table in scorn, as becomes a fearless Indian girl, and tell yonder bloodthirsty pale-face devil to cut it off. Red Hatchet has spoken!"

And this time the tones of the old warrior were proud and filled with stern rebuke.

Fired by his coldness, Siska advanced to a rude table near by, and laying her left forearm upon the board, she turned fiercely to Scavenger, her eyes flashing fire, and said:

"There! monster, take your coveted prize!"

"Ho! ho! this is vengeance!" the madman cried, striding toward the table, his long terrible knife in hand. "When I have cut that off, my thirst shall be satisfied, until a pale-face dog shall come within reach, to-morrow."

He reached the table and caught hold of her wrist, and—

Did not execute his hellish purpose! for at the instant he was about to sever the member from the hand, a man bounded quickly into the room, and seizing the Dwarf by the leg and shirt collar, raised him by the strength of his arms above his head—then hurled him forward into the capacious fire-place, where a hot fire was burning, for the mountain air was chill.

The next instant the stranger had drawn a sword from a scabbard which hung at his hip, and stood on guard. It was none other than the Stranger in Black, who had come to the rescue of Calamity Jane, a few hours before.

With a howl of rage the Dwarf scrambled from the fire-place, but not before the flames had severely scorched his hands and face and scorched some of the hair therefrom.

"You—you!" he gasped on gaining his feet, and perceiving who his assailant was.

"Yes, I!" the Unknown replied, in his deep thundering voice. "Once more we have met, and your little murderous game is foiled. Go! I give you yet until the 10th of September to live!"

For a moment the Avenger gazed in almost speechless fury at the man in black—then with a howl, he fled from the cabin.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO KILLED PIUTE DAVE?

WHEN the Dwarf was out of sight, the Unknown turned to Red Hatchet, and gazed at him a moment, silently.

"You are like the rest of your red race—a demon!" he said, finally, with biting sarcasm. "I'd be doing your child an act of mercy, you old snake, if I threw you into that fire, and allowed you to burn to a crisp!"

"Oh! no! no!" Siska cried, pleadingly. "Don't do that, sir. He is my father, and getting old. Please spare him for my sake."

"For your sake, then, be it, for I can but remember that I am under deep obligations to you," the Unknown said, bowing.

Siska looked surprised.

"The daughter of Red Hatchet is grateful to the dark stranger," she said, "but does not understand why he feels under obligations to her."

"Nor is there need that she should," the Unknown replied. "In the mean time, beware of the mad Dwarf, and if he again offers to trouble you, shoot him on the spot!"

With this parting injunction, the man of mystery turned, and strode from the cabin, out into the early gloaming of the night.

Calamity Jane had overheard the conversation between Mrs. Morris and Carrol Carner, for it so chanced that her room adjoined that of the Mormon schemer, and there being only a thin board partition, every word that had been spoken came distinctly to

Mormon villain," she said, "and I allow he'll find his hands full."

She went down-stairs into the bar-room, to see if the California lady was there, but found that she was not. There was a big crowd of the miners and roughs present, however, among whom were Piute Dave, and the bullwhacker poet, Shakespeare.

The latter had evidently been indulging in a goodly number of 'bootlegs,' for he was catering to the tastes of the crowd by some very queer antics in the terpsichorean line.

"Dance?" he roared, with an extra shuffle; "why, galoots, ye nevyer see'd yer uncle wiggle his number thirteen. I'm a reg'lar old ballet, when I get a-goin', on single bizness, an' when ye guv me a feminine gal o' good lugs, why, old Chesterfield was nowhar wi' his ideers o' exquizut grace. Jest ter show ye, fer instances, my festive royal old kids, hyar's ther Calam frum Calamityville; she won't mind tryin' a mazzurkey wi' me, I know."

And he waltzed toward where Calamity had paused, bent on forcing her into a dance with him. But, just before he reached her, his eyes became glued upon a little instrument she held in her grasp, which mildly suggested trouble, did he advance further. So he halted:

"Why don't you come on?" Calamity asked, dryly. "Surely you are not afraid of such a little tool as this?"

"But, great Jerusalem, you'd let me have, right in the buzzom—I see d et in yer eye."

"Well, I allow you're a purty fair guesser, for I shall shoot you, kerslap, if you lay ope o' yer greasy paws on me!"

"But you'd git yanked, fer that."

"Not while I kin handle a 'six'!"

"Then ye calkylate you're a shootist, do ye, right from Shootin'ville?"

"I do, that same. I presume I am most generally able to look out for number one."

"But ye can't shoot—no siree, bobtail hoss! Thar ain't no mortal thet kin shoot, compared wi' yer uncle, ther playful poet o' ther plains. Why, w'u'd you believe et, gal, I'm ther furst patentee o' revolvyers, am I, an' I kin outshoot ary pilgrim frum Carver, down to the days o' Davy Crockett."

"I'll bet ye can't," Calamity retorted. She saw that to gain the admiration and respect of these rude men she must surprise them by some extraordinary proceeding, and there is no accomplishment that tickles a Western man so much as an exhibition of perfect marksmanship.

In this Calamity was not to be despised, for she had handled weapons too many years not to be well acquainted with their use.

"I'll bet you can't knock the neck off a bottle, thirty yards off."

"Oh! Danyel in the lions' den! what foolishness. Why, gal,

For shutin' cluss, I'm noted—
I'm ther 'ristocratic, bloated—
Ther purty sugar-coated
Pop-gun puller o' the West.

"Why, I kin toss a likker glass inter ther air, an' plunk a hoel through the bottom afore et cums down."

"You can't do it," Calamity declared, pulling out her purse, "and I'll bet just a gold eagle ag'in' it. Then, I'll turn around and bet that if you can do thet, I can take a revolver and put the bullet down the tube o' a narrow necked bottle, while it is in the air."

A cheer of enthusiasm came from the crowd at this assertion of the Girl Sport, while the poet looked rather nonplused, as he surveyed his opponent.

"Well, dog my cats, ef ye kin do thet thar's a heap more narve in ye then ye luk fer. I'll jest bet ye a squar' fifty gold-bar thet ye ken't do nothin' o' the kind."

"Taken, first dose. Put up yer collateral. Poker Jack will hold the stakes."

The bullwhacker was in earnest, and put up his "three ounce" in Jack's hands, forthwith, while Calamity handed him five eagles, and the bet was made.

"Now, then, gal, and prove yer brag," Shakespeare cried with a grin, "an' when I

git yer fifty, cuss my golden slippers ef I don't treat ther boyees ter ther best ther house affords. Oh! I'm a liberal cuss."

"So I perceive, and when you win a wager on my shootin', you'll need to bet the other way!" Calamity laughed. "You pilgrims git to either side now, and leave the center of the room clear for it's whole length, so that nobody shall git hurt—it would be a great pity to harm so respectable an assemblage. I could never forgive myself were I to kill half a dozen of you. Now, then, you bullwhacker, procure an empty bottle, and stand half way down the room, to the right side, and when I give the word, toss the bottle up into the air, the neck towards me. I will take my position at the upper end of the room here, and if you toss the bottle as I order, I'll agree to put a bullet down the neck so that it will come out the bottom. Get ready now!"

Her orders were promptly obeyed. The crowd moved to one side, and she and Shakespeare took their respective positions.

"Gentlemen, you want ter peel yer eyes now," the bullwhacker said, feeling considerable uneasiness as to the result of his wager. "A gal o' starling qualities this gal Calam, may be, but et won't do nary harm ter watch her very close, ye see. Ther'fore, peel yer eyes, and peel 'em good, an' watch her leetle game—'ca'se fer me ter lose my ducats, b'yees, 'd be a beastly shame. Selah! Cum, gal, be yer ready?"

"Not yet!" Calamity answered, taking her position. "The light in the room is so bright that it dazzles my eyes. Will some one tie a handkerchief over one of my eyes—you, Poker Jack?"

The host of the Poker House assented, and according to directions, effectually blindfolded the left eye of the eccentric girl dare-devil.

"Now, then—one—two—three!" she cried, cocking and raising her revolver before she had uttered "three."

The instant she uttered the momentous word, the bullwhacker tossed a long-necked bottle into the air, as directed, with a "kil yi!" The next instant there was a loud report—a smashing of glass—a yell of human pain.

Down to the floor fell the bottle with the bottom knocked out; down to the floor fell Piute Dave, grasping at his side, from which a stream of blood was cozing, and dyeing the floor.

Calamity had won her wager!

And Piute Dave had lost his life.

Had one bullet done it all?

That was a question unanswerable by any present, as all eyes had been riveted upon the bottle as it whirled through the air.

It had all occurred in an instant, and brought surprise to every one—even Calamity, who heard the fall.

"I am killed—the cursed girl in breeches did it!" Piute Dave gasped, blood spurting from his mouth, as he spoke. "Kill her, some one—cut her heart out!"

"Back!" Calamity cried, tearing the handkerchief from before her eye, and leveling her re-cocked weapon at the crowd. "This is a lie! I did not shoot that man. Look at the bottle—there is a hole through it! You will at once see that I could not have done both jobs with one bullet."

"You lie—you lie!" Piute Dave yelled, raising frantically upon his elbow, and attempting to draw his revolver, but the exertion was more than he was capable of, and he dropped back upon the floor—dead!

For a moment thereafter the silence in the room was so intense that a pin-fall could have been heard.

Then, Poker Jack spoke:

"The gal is right, boys," he said, decidedly. "She could not hev bored thet hole through the end of the bottle, an' killed Dave too."

"A gal who's clever enuff ter even chuck cold lead inter ther throat o' a bottle when et was tumblin' somersaults in mid-air, ar' enuff possessed o' ther devil ter do most anything, I allow," an old miner declared, with a grunt of disapproval, and this view of the matter also

seemed to meet a favorable response from his companions.

"It's a big thing to do, of course," Poker Jack assented; "but look! yonder is a splinter in the door at the other end of the room, that shows where the bullet went, after goin' through the bottle."

An exclamation confirmed his declaration. A bullet was lodged in the door, in plain view, in a spot where the door had hitherto been unmarred.

"That don't settle the question, however!" a voice cried, and Carrol Carner, who had been standing, since the shooting, in the doorway that opened into the hall, now advanced into the bar-room. "I've got a little finger to intrude into this pie!"

"Well, what have you got to say?" Calamity demanded, turning fiercely upon him, for from his voice she knew he was the same man who was dealing so villainously with Mrs. Morris.

"I have this to say!" he replied, with a triumphant smile—"that while all other eyes were turned upon the bottle, mine were upon you, and I saw you fire two revolvers, instead of one; one was leveled at the dead man here, the other at the bottle, and both exploded simultaneously making one report!"

"My God! what a lie!" Calamity Jane gasped; then—"Back! back, you devils—" as the crowd rushed at her, and she opened rapid fire upon them with two revolvers, resolved to sell her life and liberty dearly.

But they were a hundred to one—what could be the result?

They had secured her in the hard unyielding grasp of a dozen pairs of hands, in almost a moment, but not until her unerring aim had sent four strong men upon their backs, and several others wounded.

"Out with her! String her up!" roared the Bullwhacker Poet, who had been one of those to sustain a scratch in the face.

"Yes! give the murderous hussy a rope!" cried Carrol Carner. "She deserved it long ago!"

"Hold! Pause before you do this outrage!" a deep stern voice cried, and there entered the room the same strange black-bearded stranger whom we have known as the Unknown.

He had no weapons in hand to stay the mob that had Calamity Jane in their power; it was the commanding tone of voice, and his dark, forbidding appearance, that caused the rude crowd to pause and await an explanation of his advent.

"Stop!" he repeated. "This girl belongs to me to kill. I have a mortgage upon the life you would take, and I propose to attend to the foreclosure myself; still, realizing your revengeful spirit toward her, I will give you a chance to win her for your own disposal. Select some man from your crowd, who is expert at knife-throwing, and we will throw six knives apiece at a round chalk mark, the size of a silver dollar on yonder door, while standing twenty paces from the aforesaid door. The man who puts the most knives nearest to the chalk center shall have the girl!"

"That's me, every day in the week, you bet!" cried the poet, executing a ludicrous caper. "Right on my muscle aire I at tossin' knives, way up ter ther shoulder; ther byees knows who I am an' ther my specialty is chet, an' compilin' beautiful gems o' poetry. Eh! boyees—shall we hev a leetle o' ther blady amusement?"

Piute Dave lay dead upon the floor—these men of Death Notch looked next after him, to Shakespeare, as their leader, and gave a growl of assent.

"It is well!" the Unknown said, "for had you refused, you would never have escaped from this place alive, as 't is in my power to strike every one of you dead, at a single blow!"

It was a bold declaration, but had its effect. The crowd cowered in superstition from the gaze of this dark forbidding stranger.

"Go ahead, and collect a dozen bowie knives, and also mark a dollar-sized circle on yonder door, with a piece of chalk. Then, place all twenty feet and lead off," the stranger commanded.

Shakespeare followed the instructions promptly, and then, armed with his allowance of knives, took his position.

It was now to be a test of skill for the life of Calamity Jane, who was still held a prisoner.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNKNOWN WINS—AND LOSES.

It was the Black Unknown who gave the word 'go,' and the bullwhacker hurled his knife directly toward the chalk mark upon the door. Hurling it well, too, for it struck within a couple of inches of the hastily-prepared bull's-eye.

A cheer went up from the crowd, who had hitherto had no particular amount of faith in the bullwhacker's aim, and it tickled the poet hugely, for he executed a grotesque breakdown in celebration of his first good throw.

"Ho! ho! who sayeth that ther great Peruvian Poet ain't on his muscle?" he roared, with a broad grin. "Did ye see how purty thet noble blade went quivering clusster the eye of the bull? This time I'll put out the bovine's sight, entirely, you bet!"

But he didn't.

The knife went further from the bull's-eye than the first one.

"Kerwhoop! I got nervous thet time, an' put on too much elbow," he cried, a little chagrined. "Knife-throwin' is about as uncertain as life, I tell ye. A fellar can't tell when he's goin' ter make a miss-go!"

The next throw was more successful, for the knife went quivering into the center of the bull's-eye, precisely.

"Thar! feast yer eyes on that, will ye, an' tremble in yer boots!" the bullwhacker shouted, turning to the Unknown. "Ob, I'm a colt, I am!—I'm a snortin', cavortin' war-hoss, right from ther histronic battle-field o' Waterloo, where water was first invented. Here goes ag'in fer another bull's-eye!"

And, sure enough, he did succeed in putting the blade point of his fourth knife in the circle close beside its predecessor.

Another round of applause came from the friends of the bullwhacker.

"I guess that surprises our black-bearded friend!" Carrol Carner ejaculated, sarcastically.

"Not nearly so much as an early death will surprise you, sir!" the Unknown retorted. "Indeed, I am pleased to see your man exhibit so much skill in the use of the knife, and presume he will win."

"You may hope so, for your own good, you Mormon devil!" Calamity cried, turning her glittering eyes upon the Salt Lake ruffian, "for if I get free, you can bet I'll make mince-meat of you."

This, too, elicited quite a cheer, for the Mormon was no favorite among the roughs, despite his effort to establish himself in their confidence.

Altogether, the audience was getting very enthusiastic.

"I have no fear of serious consequences!" Carner responded, with provoking composure.

"Nor need you," the Unknown replied, grimly, "for even if the girl escapes your vengeance, she is not through with me, I fancy. Ha! ha! no!"

"In what way have I deserved your enmity?" Calamity demanded, more surprised than ever, for she had believed she would gain her liberty at the hands of this strange dark individual, whose voice was like the sullen growl of thunder.

"That remains to be told," he replied. "Suffice to say that I hold a mortgage against your life, which I shall foreclose. If I don't win, you are still the prisoner of these gents you see around you. Go ahead, sir bullwhacker;—you have yet two knives to throw!"

"An' hyar they go. Jest feast yer eyes on ther Shakespearean wind up o' this exciting dramyer."

Whiz! away sped the fifth knife from the poet's hand, and buried its keen point deep in the door a half a foot from the bull's-eye.

"Bah! thet don't look as if you were going to win!" Carrol Carner growled. "You'll lose the girl, you fool, and cheat us out of our vengeance!"

"Ef he loses her, et's his loose, pilgrim!" one of the miners said, "an' ef Black Beard wins her fair, he shall hev her, 'cause we're square we aire—eh! ain't that so, boys?"

The men of Death Notch gave a nod of assent.

Carrol Carner, however, was not so easily satisfied. He was looking at the Unknown with a keen eye, and he was not at all sure that the Unknown was not a friend of the girl.

would not be given to the Unknown, under any circumstances.

Whiz! Shakespeare's last knife hurtled through the air, and entered the bull's-eye—making just half of its allotted number which had entered the circle.

"Very good, indeed," the Unknown said, "but I think I can put the whole six in the circle. Pull out your knives and I will try, at least."

Shakespeare obeyed, not nearly so well pleased as he might have been.

"I order 'a' put 'em all hum, myself," he said, "but every time I'd git jest ready to let fly, some consarned line o' poetry would pop inter my noddle, an' discombobberate my aim. Hyar's one that popped in, just as I heaved the last knife:

'Mary had a little lamb;
At her et uster kick,
She pulled the wool all off its back
An' made a feather tick.'

"Well, please don't give us any more of the same style, or it may injure my aim also," the Unknown added, satirically, as he equipped himself with his knives preparatory to the test. "Watch me now, to see that I do it fairly."

He then hurled one of the bowies toward the door. Thud! it entered the circle exactly in the center, the blade passing through the door up to the hilt, illustrating, strikingly, with what force the missile had been thrown.

"Pull that knife out; I want to put another in the same place," he said, with a faint smile.

It was done, and he was as good as his word—he hurled another knife into the same spot.

One after another was pulled out, and one after another he buried in the same hole, until he had not only exhausted his own half-dozen, but had also buried the poet's knives there, too, without making a miscalculation in his aim!

When he had finished he turned to the spectators, with a bit of triumph gleaming in his eyes.

"Have I won, gentlemen?" he demanded, with a smile.

The cheer that followed spoke better than words of their decision.

"On course you've gone an' won, an' I be dratted ef ye didn't do et fair an' squar," an' ther gal is yourn, declareth I, William Henry Shakespeare, mayor o' this hyar town o' Death Notch. Give us yer 'and, you galoot!—yer 'and, guv'nor, your 'and, ter squeeze jest fer good luck!"

"No, I thank you! I do not care to shake the hand of a greater rogue than myself," the Unknown replied, dryly. Then he turned to Calamity:

"Girl, I have won you, fairly, and now you are doubly mine. But I do not want you, jest yet, and so will give you your liberty for a few days, well knowing that you will not dare to run away. Gents, give her her liberty, and see that she is offered no molestation until I get ready to claim my revenge. Ha! ha! it shall be sweet revenge—the revenge of years' maturing!"

Then, with a grim laugh, the dark stranger wrapped his cloak closer about him, and stalked from the tavern.

One or two of the miners went to the door, after him, and saw him stride swiftly away up one of the gloomy gulches which centered into the basin like the spokes of a wheel to the hub.

Calamity was then released, but Carner had taken precaution to escape to his room, to have trouble.

Just outside of the basin, in the moonlight that streamed into the gulch, the Unknown came unexpectedly upon a woman who was seated upon a fallen tree, and engaged in a good old-fashioned cry.

The new-fashioned cry of to-day, is a combination of sighs and snuffles; consequently it occurred to the Unknown that this woman's hearty cut and out cry might safely be pronounced old-fashioned.

He was considerably surprised at his discovery, and hesitated about disturbing her. But resolved to learn her trouble, he finally stepped forward and touched her upon the shoulder.

"Excuse me, madam, but is your trouble of a nature that needs assistance from a strong and willing hand of one whose whole life has been one of trouble?"

Mrs. Morris—for it was she—looked up with a start.

"Who are you, sir?" she demanded, in alarm, for his dark and forbidding appearance did not favorably impress her.

"One who is a gentleman, and a friend to the oppressed, ma'am, even tho' dark my aspect."

Coming accidentally upon you, and noting your evident grief, I was prompted to ask if a strong hand could be of assistance in alleviating the trouble. No offense, I trust?"

"Not necessarily, if you are sincere in what you say," Mrs. Morris replied, a little more assured. "I am in deep trouble, and fear I can obtain no relief. I have lost my only daughter, and cannot find her. I tracked her to this bad, wicked town of Death Notch, but only to find that she had suddenly disappeared."

"Ah! then you are Mrs. Morris, a California lady?" the Unknown said, his surprise doubling, for at first he could form no idea of her identity.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Morris, but how could you know that?"

"Because the circumstances of your daughter's flight to this country are known to me! Your daughter is a guest in my solitary camp in the mountains, and she told me her story. It was I who abducted her from the tavern, that she might not become the victim of her enemy, the Mormon villain."

"God be praised!" the relieved mother cried, clasping her hands joyfully. "You are sure she is there, safe and well?"

"She was, this morning, when I left her there, in the care of her negro companion. Come with me, and you shall soon see her."

"How can I ever repay you for this kindness? You have taken a great load from my heart. How far is it to the place where I can see my daughter?"

"Not over a mile, and we can soon walk it. Will you take my arm?"

"No, thanks! I am quite strong and love to walk. Lead, and I will follow. Oh! sir, my daughter is of good cheer, is she?"

"Quite brave considering the trials she has passed through, I judge. Her negro companion is lively enough to cheer her up, were she gloomily disposed," the Unknown declared, as he led the way up the gulch.

"Did she tell you why she fled from home?"

"Yes. I could well understand her case, for I came near being caught in such a trap once, myself," was the gloomy answer. "This being found standing over dead persons does not always signify that the one so discovered is guilty. The guilty one glides away where the unwary and thoughtless approaches."

The remainder of the journey was finished in silence.

Mrs. Morris was busied with her own thoughts—congratulating herself on having her child in spite of Carrol Carner, and wondering if they would be lucky enough to escape from the mountains before he could find and offer them further molestation as he had promised.

She felt that he was capable of any villainy no matter how base.

In the course of a half hour they came to an abrupt termination of the gulch, in the face of a mighty, towering wall of rock, at the foot of which was a hut of boughs and poles, and in front of that a crane upon which a kettle hung over a temporary fire-place.

There was no visible stir about the place as they approached, and the Unknown quickened his pace.

"They must have gone inside," he said, but his words belied his belief; he scented trouble!

A few steps further, and they came upon an appalling spectacle!

Seated upon the ground, with his back leaning against the tree was Nicodemus Johnsing, with his banjo in his hands, as if preparatory to playing.

But he was stone dead!

"By heaven, there's bad work here!" the Unknown cried, bounding forward into the hut.

He came out, an instant later, but unaccompanied.

"Your daughter is gone, madam!" he said. "Some human demon has been here and killed the darky, and carried her off, as she is not in the hut. I believe the cursed crazy Dwarf is the author of this outrage!"

CHAPTER X.

A THWARTED DESIGN.

POOR Mrs. Morris again burst into tears on learning her daughter's fate from the Unknown's lips.

"Oh! what shall I do—what can I do toward rescuing my poor child!" she cried, nearly frantic with her loss.

"You can do literally nothing, my dear madam, at present," the Unknown answered. "It will require a strong, shrewd man to pick the culprit's trail and discover his hiding-place."

"But, it may not have been this Dwarf you speak of, who has done this terrible work.

Might not Carrol Carner have discovered this place, and carried off poor Myrtle, after killing Nick?"

"I judge not. Come! I will show you the way back to the town."

"What! not without my making an attempt to discover my poor lost child?"

"Humph! you'd have poor success, as I before intimated. The best thing for you is to return to town and get accommodations at the tavern. All that can be done toward finding and rescuing your daughter I will attend to in person, with as much interest as though she were my own child."

"Oh! thank you, sir, thank you! You are a good and noble man!"

The Unknown laughed, darkly.

"Far from that, I am afraid," he said, with a grim smile. "Still I am not so bad a man as I might be, you see. Come! let us go."

They accordingly left the solitary camp and walked back to Death Notch, through the moonlight.

The Unknown accompanied Mrs. Morris nearly to the tavern and then took leave of her, promising that he would devote his earnest efforts to the recovery of her daughter.

Mrs. Morris then returned to the hotel, and to her room, which she had engaged earlier in the evening.

It was a severe blow, this second disappearance of Myrtle, to the poor mother, whose expectancy had been so wrought up by the words of the Unknown, concerning her safety.

The following day was a gloomy one. The sky was black with ominous banks of clouds, and a steady unceasing rain poured down, from early dawn till dark.

Yet within the cabin of the old chief, Red Hatchet, a cheery fire burned upon the hearth, and the chief and his daughter sat before it, the former seeking solace from his pipe, and the latter engaged on some fancy bead-work.

"It is a wild day," the chief grunted gloomily; "such a day it was that Red Hatchet was driven from his town, and nearly all his braves slaughtered. The thought causes the blood to boil in Red Hatchet's veins, and his spirit thirsts for revenge upon the pale-face usurpers, more than ever before!"

"Then why does not Red Hatchet go forward and claim his property? Was it not deeded to him by the Government, in exchange for lands in the Colorado valley, which the Government wanted, because of their golden value?"

"True! who speaks?" and the old warrior turned about in surprise, for it was not Siska who had spoken.

A young Indian, in full paint and regalia of a war-chief, stood upon the threshold—a strong, stalwart brave of straight build, and great muscular beauty, but whose every feature and style of dress proclaimed him to be of a different race of red-men than Red Hatchet, who was of a tribe fast becoming extinct—the Pawnees.

The stranger was further from the south and his features indicated him to be an Apache.

"Who is the brave whose face is covered with war paint?" Red Hatchet repeated, rising to his feet.

"Dancing Plume is no common brave but a great chief of the Apache nation," was the haughty reply. "He comes from the arid lands of Arizona into the north, with his band of braves, to seek a home in the land of game and gold, and also a wife for his wigwam. He hears of the wrongs that the pale-faces have inflicted upon Red Hatchet, and comes to offer consolation."

"The Apache and the Pawnees have ever been enemies; why does Dancing Plume then come and seek conciliation with Red Hatchet?"

"Because Red Hatchet is alone and unprotected; because his spirit cries for revenge upon the pale-face usurpers of his rights, and Dancing Plume can avenge the Pawnee's wrongs. His warriors are all young, brave and strong; they would call it but a play-spell, to clear away the pale-faces."

"Your words sound well, but Red Hatchet is not blind. The Apache had an object in thus coming to the aid of a foe of his race."

"Which Dancing Plume does not deny. Red Hatchet has a pretty daughter, whose beauty and goodness, is known widely. Dancing Plume needs a princess for his wigwam. Red Hatchet is getting old and needs some one to hunt his game. Dancing Plume would take the Pawnee maiden as his wife, win back the town of Sequoy, and with Red Hatchet dwell there in peace and prosperity."

Red Hatchet was silent a few moments; then he turned to Siska.

"What does my child say to the proposition

of the Apache chief?" he asked, his eyes gleaming at the satisfaction afforded him by the younger chief's prospectus.

"Siska has nothing to say. It was Red Hatchet who gave her to the Dwarf; it is for him to say whether he will break his treaty with the war, and give Siska to Dancing Plume," was the reply.

"Ah! then another claims the Pawnee maiden," the Apache said.

"A pale-face Dwarf, to whom Red Hatchet promised Siska, if he would carry out Red Hatchet's vengeance, as Dancing Plume has offered to do," the old chief explained.

"Show him to me, and it shall be a struggle for the victory!" was the young chief's demand. "If Dancing Plume falls, his braves shall win back the town and present it to Red Hatchet. Shall it be as the Apache has proposed? Let the Pawnee speak?"

"Red Hatchet agrees, but Dancing Plume must settle the difference with his rival!"

"Wagh! Dancing Plume courts battle! Why should he fear a pale-face dog, when from boyhood he has led at the head of his tribe? The tomahawk shall be dug up; Dancing Plume will go for his braves, and ere another sunrise after the morrow, the war-whoop of the Apache shall echo through these valleys and mountains. Dancing Plume has said it, and he never lies!"

Then, kissing his hand to Siska, he turned and left the cabin, with a firm, stately stride.

A bad outlook was there for the town of Death Notch;—a worse fate was promised those who had driven the Pawnees from their village, which an unscrupulous Indian agent had illegally assigned to them!

Carrol Carner prided himself on being a villain, and he had often said it, that the man who could conceive more efficient and novel schemes of rascality than he, was hard to find.

The following day—the same that witnessed Dancing Plume's visit to Red Hatchet—in the height of the storm, the Mormon left the town, carrying with him in a bundle, a few articles which he calculated he would need.

No one paid any attention to his departure except Calamity Jane, and she concluded that he had decided to quit the place before any trouble occurred.

About the middle of the afternoon a stranger rode into the settlement, through the pouring rain, on the back of a scrawny looking mule, and dismounting in front of the Poker House entered the bar-room.

He was a medium sized man with bushy red beard and hair, and decidedly seedy-looking.

He'd not recently visited a clothier, evidently, for his lower limbs were clad in dirty, patched overalls, thrust into the tops of a stogy pair of boots. The trousers were in turn met by a greasy red shirt, open at the throat, with accompaniment of a beltful of revolvers at the waist, and a slouch hat crammed down onto the head, until it almost hid from view the eyes.

And dripping with the rain through which he had come, this sandy-complexioned gent walked into the bar-room and up to the bar, and gasped out "whisky," in a wheezy tone, as if he had not lubricated his internal machinery very recently.

Nor did he deign to stop at a mere glass, for no sooner had Poker Jack set the bottle upon the counter, than he grabbed it up and allowed the contents to gurgle down his throat!

When he had drained it to the last drop, he returned the empty bottle to the astonished bartender with a grateful sigh, at the same time planking a ten-dollar gold piece upon the bar.

"Stranger, that war powerful bad ile—thar warn't a hornet nor even a wassup in et, ter give et life," he said, in the same wheezy voice, "but when a feller's machinery ain't iled et won't run, an' so I had to submit to the inevitable!"

"Well, I should allow et didn't cost you much of an effort," Jack grinned, "fer ye did it right gracefully, and et'll cost ye jest a V."

"Take ther saw-buck, pard—take et freely, fer I should hev given yer a twenty ef thar hed only been jest one good hornets' nest in et."

Then, wiping his mouth, he turned gravely to survey the crowd which the pouring rain had driven into the house.

It was a motley assemblage of rough-shod humanity, evil, sinister, and not pleasant to contemplate.

For several moments he surveyed them, as if making an inventory of their different natures; then he mounted a table, cleared his throat, and struck an attitude, as if about to deliver a stump oration.

"Gents—pilgrims—galoots in general, I want ter ask ye, do I luk like a cuss who would tell a lie?" he began, in oratorical tones. "Do I luk ary a bit less than a second George Washington?"

A silence among the crowd was his answer. They had not yet got an inkling of what he was driving at, and preferred to keep mum.

"Brethren," the brick-bearded bullwhacker continued, after a pause, "et doeth me dolorous to note that ye hev yet received no inspiration from the honest reflection of my countenance. But sech is fate. Bear et in mind ever hence, beauties benign, that a man who kin juggle down a quart o' Death Notch petroleum wi'out ary a bumblebee in et, is an honest man. Moreover, feller-citizens, never look adversely upon one o' yer sex because he is han'sum'. Et aire a phenomena pecooliar tew the male race o' whites. I was once jest as humbly as ary galoot present, but alas! I've hed trouble, b'yees—dire trouble, and my benign and saintly resignation ter ther inevitable hes added luster and glorious angelic beauty to my physiognomy, despite all efforts of mine to the contrary. But, I'm no saint, pilgrims; not a golden ha'r ner ther sprout uv a wing is thar about me. No sir-ee! I'm a warrior, I am—on ther war-path, yearnin' fer gore! Shell I tell you why, my disciples? Ay! I will, tho' et shall wring tears from this heart o' mine as large as watermelons.

"Ter begin wi', picter yerself a pleasant home of a well-ter do merchant—who never took over seven drinks a day—in which war a wife and a sunny-haired child. Ther devil cums inter thet house, in ther figger of a man. His oily tongue tempts ther wife; she attempts ter flee with her tempter, but her child clings ter her skirts an' begs her not ter go. In a passion the woman smites her own flesh an' blood to the floor, and flies with ther devil. The child is found by ther fond father, in a dying condishun, an' with her departin' breath, he sw'ars fer vengeance. Years pass, but at last it draweth near. Pards, hyar before ye stands thet merchant; do ye wonder he yearns fer bug-juice ter satiate his thirst fer revenge?"

"Go'r a'mighty, no!" declared Shakespeare. "B'ilin' full cl'ar ter my larnyx would I be, ef I'd been thru sech trouble."

"On course ye would, an' ef I war ter assert ter ye thet, after years of search I've trailed my faithless wife hyar ter this very house, you'd all be willin' ter lend a helpin' hand ter boost her up ter a limb o' ther furst convenient tree, wouldn't ye?"

"Ef evyer fabled monster
Did perch upon er roost—
Then we're ther very pilgrims
W'at'll lend our hands—to boost!"

quothe the poet, with a caper. "For lordy sake, man, ef thar's ary show fer a neck-tie party, issue yer invitations to us, ter oncet."

"Then know that ther murderess is in this hyar house, in the guise of a Mrs. Morris, an' I her deserted husband seek revenge," the stranger cried, fiercely. "Hurrah! let's give her the rope wi'out parley."

"Stop!" a voice cried; "don't dare to disturb that innocent woman. See! this man is an impostor!" and while speaking, Calamity Jane bounded forward from the hall where she had been listening, and tore a false beard from the "honest" man's face.

And there, exposed to the gaze of those he had cleverly deceived stood Carrol Carner, the Mormon!

CHAPTER XI.

THE POET PLOTS.

FOR a moment after his strange unmasking, Carrol Carner stood confronting the Girl Sport, almost speechless with rage; then he drew a knife and rushed fiercely at her, but stopped when he perceived that she held a cocked "six" in hand.

"Slack up yer lokermotive, ef ye please!" she ordered, peremptorily, "or I shall perforate you. Didn't 'spect I see'd you leave the tavern, did ye, and that I tumbled ter yer leetle game the minute I see'd you?"

"Everlasting curses seize you!" the baffled schemer hissed. "If you put up that pistol I'll kill you!"

"It would be rather kind of me to give you that advantage, but I can't hardly see ther point!" Calamity returned, dryly. "And, I allow thet, fer yer own personal safety, et would be your likeliest move to make yourself scarce about this burg. In other words, I'll give you five minutes to git! If I see enough of your anatomy after that, to get a decent aim at, I'll

blow you higher than dynamite blowed Hell Gate."

"But I protest!—Gentlemen, I appeal to you for protection!" the scoundrel cried, turning to the rough-shod audience he had just been addressing. "Will you see me thus bulldozed by this young tigress in breeches?"

"I allow ye'll hev ter fight yer own battle, pilgrim!" poetical Shakespeare asserted, with a broad grin. "Ye war superfine at pullin' sheepskin over our eyes an' we opine ye'll hef ter rest on yer own oars—you bet! Ef the gal sez *git*, I allow thet is about the healthiest thing you kin do."

"Yes, you bet, and you'll need to be expeditious in order to get out of range of my pop-gun in the four minutes that yet remain," Calamity added, glancing at her watch. "Come! be moving, or you're a cadaver, sure! And recollect, if I ever catch you in this town hereafter, I shall pop you over without ceremony."

Carner gazed at her a few seconds with a face that was livid with rage, and then turned and strode to the door. "Remember!" he cried, turning and shaking his clinched fist at her; then he hurried forth into the pouring rain.

Calamity followed him to the door, and kept her revolver leveled at him until he had left the basin, then she returned to the bar-room, from whence she went to her own apartment, upstairs.

The poet bullwhacker was a shrewder man than many gave him credit for being. While outwardly blatant and boastful, he was capable of putting this and that together and forming some pretty correct conclusions.

Among others he had lately conceived a little money-making plan of his own, from things that had come to his notice.

In the first place, he had by figuring and guessing concluded that the girl, Virgie Verner—or more correctly Myrtle Morris—was of more pecuniary value than ordinary girls, for the reason that she was wanted by two parties—first by Carrol Carner, who had offered five hundred dollars reward for her, and secondly by Mrs. Morris. How much could be extorted from her the bullwhacker had no idea, but he had conceived an idea that she would be glad to pay still more handsomely.

In the second place, he had formed another idea that he could find the girl. He had twice gotten a glimpse of Old Scavenger, the Mad Dwarf—he had seen the terrible face of the Avenger at the tavern window the night of Piute Dave's death, and knew the Dwarf had been the one who had fired the fatal bullet simultaneous with the report of Calamity Jane's weapon. Something argued to him that Virgie was in Scavenger's power.

Thus concluding, the poet formed a determination to obtain possession of the girl, himself, if possible, and surrender her to the one who would pay the most for her.

On the day following, which was a pleasant, sunny one, he left the town, and spent his time in the mountains and forests that surrounded Death Notch, on every hand.

His object in this was to obtain a glimpse of the Dwarf. One glimpse was all he wanted—he could then strike the maniac's trail and follow it, no matter where it led—for not many years before the bullwhacker had been a scout upon the plains, and had acquired great skill in picking and following trails.

"Ter solve this hyar enigma
Must I see his nibs conf'g' me,
Then may Satan all unr'ig me
An' b'ars an' wildcats dig me,
Ef I do not find ther pigmy!"

he said, smiting his brow.

It was well along in the day ere he caught a glimpse of Old Scavenger descending a mountain path. The Dwarf had a haunch of a recently killed deer upon his shoulder, and was evidently making for his camp.

No sooner did he spy him, than the poet secreted himself hastily in a clump of chaparral, and waited to learn which course the maniac would take after reaching the gulch.

"Oh! now I've struck a lead;
His trail I'll quickly read;
I'll next thing git him treed,
An' waltz off wi' ther gal—indeed!"

was the poetical thought of the bullwhacker.

Scavenger continued to descend the rugged path, until he reached the gulch bottom, when he paused and glared around him, as if to assure himself that no one was in the vicinity.

His eyes gleamed with a wild unnatural fire, and altogether he was a horrible object to see.

That he was utterly insane no one could doubt, who beheld him.

After a moment's survey of his surroundings, he turned and strode up the western course of the gulch, which led into the heart of the wooded mountains.

Allowing him to get fairly out of sight, the bullwhacker then emerged from concealment, and took up the trail, and followed it, step for step.

"Ef I shouldn't find ther gal, I'll be madder'n ther hornet who out o' spite bit off his own ear," he soliloquized. "I allow, however, thet I'm on ther right trail."

The Dwarf led him a long walk ere the destination came into view, and caution required the trailer to stop.

The Avenger's camp was in the gulch bottom in a little forest glade. A rude camp-lodge of boughs had been constructed for shelter. Near this, upon a log, sat none other than Virgie Verner—or Myrtle Morris, the Mormon's bride and victim.

She was not free however. A strong small-linked chain was locked about her waist, and then fastened to the strong limb of a tree overhead which shaded the spot where she sat.

From his position which was several rods distant from the camp, Shakespeare could not hear anything that was said by either the fair prisoner or her captor, but he saw the Dwarf shake his fist at the former, as he laid down his haunch of meat.

"The cussed leetle skunk is ugly ter her, I opine," the poet grunted, disapprovingly. "Wonder ef I hadn't better pop him over, and done with it? Guess, however, et would be best ter tackle him when he's asleep, and secure him in the real flesh an' blood. Ef I war ter put 'im in a cage, I expect I could hire him out ter Barnum, as a curiosity."

It was getting dark, and not being particularly desirous of shedding human blood, the poet decided to postpone action until the Dwarf slept.

In the mean time, Scavenger built a fire, and slicing off some meat from the haunch, with his keen knife, spitted it upon a stick, and proceeded to roast it. When he had a sufficient quantity prepared, he laid several pieces upon a chip, and handed the food to Myrtle, who had been watching him, with a grave, anxious face.

"There! eat, you girl! that will bring the roses back to your cheek, for me to kiss away!" he said with a horrible grin.

Myrtle pushed the meat away, in disgust.

"I do not want anything to eat, you human beast!" she gasped, in horror. "All I want of you is to release me, and let me go my way."

"Oh! ho! that would be kinder nice, wouldn't it?" he grunted. "But, you're in too much of a hurry, my rosebud, I wouldn't send you off at night. You must wait till morning!"

"Ah! then, will you release me? Oh! please say that you will!" the young woman said, pleadingly.

"Yes! yes! I'll release you—to be sure I will—from every earthly care, trial and temptation. I'll send you where Deadwood Dick sent my child—oh, yes I will! I'll cut yer pretty throat, an' ye'll die easy, an' go straight to Jordan's golden shores, on ther broad route!"

Myrtle uttered a scream, as she comprehended his purpose.

"Oh! surely—surely you will not harm me sir? Only promise me that you won't! What have I ever done that you should wish to kill me?"

"Nothing! nothing at all! but I have sworn to kill every white hellion I could get a hold of, and I shall fulfill my oath. To-morrow, just at sunrise, you shall die, and there will be another notch upon Red Hatchet's tally-pole, put there by me. Ha! ha! ha!"

And he laughed like a demon incarnate, as he was.

Poor Myrtle!

What else could she do more appropriate than indulge in a good hearty cry?—which she did.

It did not affect the Avenger, however, for he ate ravenously of raw meat, after which he smoked his pipe, and rolled himself up in his blanket near the fire, preparatory to going to sleep.

Myrtle's chain was of considerable length, so that she could enter the hut and recline upon a bed of boughs which had been provided for her.

Outside the camp, the bullwhacker poet waited impatiently for the midnight hour to arrive, having decided that it would be his best time to act.

It came, at last, and he stole stealthily forward, with cat-like tread, into the glade, a cocked revolver in his hand ready for use in case necessity compelled him to fight for his prize.

He soon reached the Dwarf's side without arousing him. Then, armed with a rope he sprung upon the unsuspecting Avenger, and secured his hands in almost a twinkling; then his feet; so that Scavenger was utterly powerless to move by the time he had fully awakened to a sense of what was going on.

"Curses on you!" he gasped, struggling to get free. "Who are you?—what do you mean?—what d'ye want?"

"My name is William Henry Shakespeare, ther poet o' ther West, an' philosophical protector of the wimmen's rights," the bullwhacker declared. "I'm goin' ter bind ye ter a tree fer wolf-fodder—then waltz off wi' yer captive!"

And he was as good as his word. Securely binding the Dwarf to a tree, he then entered the tent, bound Myrtle hand and foot, and throwing her over his shoulder, strode away out of the glade, followed by terrible curses from the lips of Old Scavenger.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD SCAVENGER'S SCALP.

NOT long after the departure of the bullwhacker, Old Scavenger had quite exhausted his vocabulary of epithets, and relapsed into a more quiet state.

"Curse the bullwhacker," he hissed, "he has robbed me of my vengeance, and tied me here at the mercy of the wild beasts, or any passer-by who might be of a disposition to torment me. Ho! who comes here?"

In the early moonlight, he saw a man enter the glade, and stride directly toward him.

Nearer he approached, and the Avenger was enabled to make him out as an Indian in full war paint.

It was Dancing Plume the Apache.

A shiver of dread and doubt went over the Dwarf's figure, when he perceived it was not old Red Hatchet, as he had at first believed.

What would the Indian do to him?

Perhaps take advantage of his helplessness, and scalp and torture him!

Not so demented was Scavenger as not to realize the doubtful comfort of such a proceeding.

But, Dancing Plume was not that kind of a warrior. He was willing and not afraid to meet an enemy face to face, weapon to weapon.

He had accidentally discovered the captive Dwarf, from the edge of the glade, and recognizing him as his rival in the suit for the hand of Siska, he resolved to take advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to come to a settlement.

"Wagh! what is the little poodle pale-face doing, in this shape?" he demanded, pausing before the Avenger, and surveying him, sternly. "Why is he bound to a tree?"

"A cussed bullwhacker took me a prisoner when I was asleep, and left me in this condition," Old Scavenger replied. "You're good Injun—you will set me free."

"Dancing Plume will set the pale-face free, but he must draw his knife and fight for his scalp and his life," the Apache chief responded, gruffly.

"But, why? What have I ever done that you should wish to force me into a fight?" Scavenger demanded, in alarm, for, though of great prowess, himself, he was aware that the Apaches are wonderfully accomplished in the use of the knife.

"Poodle pale-face is Dancing Plume's rival!" the young warrior answered. "He holds a claim upon Siska, the mountain flower, and Dancing Plume also claims her. Therefore, the poodle pale-face must win her by killing Dancing Plume, or lose her by losing his own life."

As he concluded speaking, the young war-chief cut Scavenger's bonds, and then stood on guard, his keen blade ready for use.

"Draw your knife and strike," he said, firmly. "It need not take long to find out who wins the mountain maiden!"

Scavenger measured his opponent with his wild eyes, for a moment, and then shook his head, doubtfully.

"The Indian is too skilled with the knife for the pale-face to hope to win. Therefore—I'll skip!"

And, even as he spoke, he dodged to one side, and ran for dear life.

But in this he had counted without his host.

His first leap had not taken him so far that he could miss a terrible blow in the back from Dancing Plume's knife—a blow that promised to weaken him beyond the power of flight.

We will pass over the scene that followed as something too horrible to describe.

Suffice to say, when he presented himself at

the cabin of Red Hatchet, that evening, Dancing Plume wore dangling from his belt the reeking scalp of the Dwarf Avenger.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO SENSATIONS.

SEVERAL days passed, thereafter, without any incident worthy of mention.

Mrs. Morris remained at the Poker House, in Death Notch, anxiously awaiting, from the Unknown, tidings of her lost daughter. Calamity kept her company most of the time, and did much to cheer and comfort her.

Not a glimpse had been caught of Carrol Carner since his departure at the order of the girl sport, and it was hoped that he had cleared out for good.

On the fourth morning after the night of Old Scavenger's death, the town of Death Notch was "billed like a sarcus," as one miner remarked. Posters, hand-printed, were stuck up in every conspicuous place; and, what was more, they were the proclamations of two separate parties, each having a different subject to unfold to the gaping assemblage that swarmed forth to read them.

First and most important to the average citizen, was a poster concerning themselves, which read thus:

"NOTICE.

"To the pale-face dogs who drove Red Hatchet and his tribe from the town of Sequoy, which the Government had given him, warning is given that unless they fly at once to their own pale-face country, their scalps shall hang upon the lodge-pole of 'DANCING PLUME, Chief of the Apaches.'"

The meaning was plain enough, but the rough men of Death Notch did not take any 'stock' in it.

More than one threat had been thus hurled at them by Red Hatchet, but had not been executed; what reason had they to believe that this one would be?

The other poster was framed in language more familiar, and ran:

"NOTICE!

"To every man, female an' cherub wi' in ther classic precincts of Death Notch:

"On ther morrow, at sunrise, I, William Henry Shakespeare, shall expose at public auction, from on top of Pictor Rock, nigh yer town, ther following property, ter wit:

"One Purty Piece o' Humanity, o' ther femernine gender, aged about twenty; good sound teeth; travels purty good jog; sired by a Californy chap; warranted gentle and good lukin'. Found astray in ther mountings, an' will be sold ter ther highest bidder, ter defray expenses of keepin' an' transper-tation. Dog-goned gud barg'in.

"Purty as a new wax figger;
Jes' like a angel—but leetle bigger;
Sweet as blazes—bet yer life—
Chance fer pilgrims ter git a wife.

"A big attendance is desired.

"WILLIAM H. SHAKESPEARE, Auctioneer."

This created more of a sensation than Dancing Plume's proclamation.

Calamity read it, and at once communicated the news to Mrs. Morris.

"Et's your boss chance to git back yer gal!" she said. "The one who bids the most gets her!"

"But, I can do nothing. I have but a hundred dollars with me, and it is more than probable that some ruffian would bid above that sum, to get my poor child in his power," Mrs. Morris answered, in deep distress. "Oh! dear, what can I do?"

"Well, we'll see," Calamity said, meditatively. "There's allus more than one way out of the woods, and we'll work it, somehow. I don't happen to be over-flush with 'bits,' myself, or I might add a little to your pile. I'll go out and skirmish, and see what I can find, for we must be prepared to bid smart, to-morrow."

She went down stairs, and for a wonder found Poker Jack the only inmate of the bar-room.

He was seated tipped back in an easy-chair, engaged in reading, but looked up with a nod.

"Pleasant morning, Calamity!" he saluted. "Quite a sensation stirred up again, eh? to break the monotony?"

"So it seems, Jack. I allow I did you a squar' deal, when you were in trouble, once, up in Deadwood, didn't I?"

"You bet ye did, Calamity, and I have always remembered it, because I'd been subject to a funeral expense, but for you."

"Well, I was handy to help you, and considered you deserved it. And, now, if I was to ask a favor of you, what would you say?"

"I'd grant it, in a minute, old friend. You have but to name it."

"Well, I'll tell you what I want: I want

money to bid off Mrs. Morris's daughter, to-morrow!"

Then she went on and explained the circumstances already known to the reader.

Jack listened a few moments, and then scratched his curly head.

"Well, I allow I can do a little toward remedying the difficulty," he announced. "Let the girl go fer what she will, I'll get her. Mrs. Morris can bid as high as her pile goes, and I'll take care of all above it."

CHAPTER XIV.

DEATH NOTCH NO MORE—A CLOSING ACT.

THE next morning dawned brightly, and by sunrise nearly every man, woman and child of Death Notch had forsaken the camp, for the scene of Shakespeare's auction.

Picture Rock was a high mass of rocks deposited in the gulch a few hundred rods beyond the town. The sides were almost perpendicular, up and down, rendering it impossible to reach the top of the pile except by use of a rude stone staircase which Indians of past ages had hewn out—and these were so arranged that a person at the top could easily defend himself from the attack of a small regiment.

The sides of these rocks were covered by grotesque pictures of Indians, animals and reptiles, which had been chiseled there by rude and savage sculptors.

Upon the top of the rock two blocks of stone answered the purpose of chairs, and on these the poet and his prisoner were seated.

Poor Myrtle's face was tear-stained and wore a sorrowful expression, but it lighted up, and she gave a cry of joy when she saw the familiar face of her mother.

"Oh! mamma! mamma!" she cried, putting forth her hands—"save me!"

"Yes, my child!" Mrs. Morris cried, tears standing in her eyes. "Have courage, dearest!"

When he saw that his audience had gained about as large proportions as it was likely to, the bullwhacker arose, a pair of cocked revolvers in his hands,

"Feller-citerzens!" he cried, "et does me proud ter see ye all here. I knew you'd cum, because ye all wenter bid fer my prize. She's mine; I captured her, an' I'm goin' ter sell 'er fer ther highest market price, an' I'll shute ther furst one who tries ter take her, afore I'm paid. Now, how much do I hear fer ther gal—how much fer her, jest as she is? Recollect—terms ar' cash, on delivery o' goods."

"Two bits!" cried a miner.

"Fifty dollars!" cried another.

"One hundred!" shouted still another.

"That's et! keep the ball in motion boys!" the poet cried, with enthusiasm. "Put all the value on her ye can, fer ye know I allus invite ther crowd to drink when ther state o' my finances will admit!"

"I'll give a hundred more!" Poker Jack said coolly.

"Two—two hundred dollars I have—who'll make it three?"

"Five hundred—I'll give five hundred!" a voice cried—the voice of Carrol Carner, but, just where he stood among the crowd no one could see.

"I'll make it a thousand!" Poker Jack cried. "I'm going to have the girl, gentlemen; so the rest of you might as well give up."

"Twelve hundred! We'll see who has the girl!" the voice of Carrol Carner again cried, and this time Calamity was on the watch and saw whence the voice emanated.

The Mormon was rigged out with long black beard and hair, and accoutered with miner's habiliments, and was also armed with a pick, shovel and pan.

"If I keep my word, I'll have to go over and plug him," she mused. "I'll wait and see, first, how this turns out."

"I'll raise it to fifteen hundred!" Poker Jack said, promptly, "and I've got the ducats to pay it."

"Look! look!" some one shouted, and all eyes were turned down the gulch.

Coming toward them, mounted upon a flying horse, was the Unknown, yelling and waving his hat above his head.

Behind him, not hardly out of rifle range, came a dark mass of horsemen, whose horrible screeches and nodding plumes proclaimed them to be Indians!

In an instant all was consternation and confusion, and flight was made in every direction. No one thought of aught but their own safety, except Poker Jack.

Even he was alarmed, but saw that action was necessary. He saw the bullwhacker desert

his prize by leaping from the rocks and seeking flight; he saw one black-whiskered man make for the staircase, and knew it was the Mormon. Drawing a revolver he fired at his legs, and brought him down to the ground, howling with rage.

"Quick! quick!" he cried to Myrtle, running to the foot of the cliff; "jump off and I'll catch you!"

Though bound and helpless, she contrived to fall over the edge, and he caught her neatly in his arms.

Then, still carrying her thus, he bade Mrs. Morris follow him, and dashed up a narrow ravine, which none of the others had taken. Nor did he pause until he had, with the precautions of a veteran scout covered their trail, and reached a place of safety in a mountain cleft, several miles from the Picture Rocks.

Here for the present they were in no danger of molestation from foes, either red or white.

The same could not be said of the others.

Like a hurricane of wrath the warriors under the lead of Dancing Plume swept down in pursuit of the late residents of Death Notch, and shot down and scalped them without mercy. Some may have escaped, but it is doubtful if many did so. Among the fortunate ones was the Unknown, whose horse was fleet enough to carry him beyond the reach of the savages.

Only one prisoner was taken back to the ill-fated town of Death Notch, and that one was Calamity Jane.

After remaining several days in the mountains, Mrs. Morris and Myrtle, escorted by Poker-Jack, started on foot for the nearest railway station, which they reached after about two week's travel afoot. From there they returned to California, Jack still accompanying them and defraying their expenses.

And he having decided to live a more respectable existence, it is not impossible that Myrtle will reward him with her hand at no far distant day.

For several days Calamity was kept locked up in a cabin, which was guarded by savages, and left to herself, except when some food was brought her.

One evening she was greatly surprised to see the Unknown enter the cabin.

"Come!" he said. "Your imprisonment is at an end. I have, through the kindness of Red Hatchet's daughter, secured your freedom, with the proviso that we both leave this place forever!"

She at once consented.

If she went with him, her fate could be little if any worse than if she remained with the savages.

Therefore they both mounted horses, outside the cabin, and rode forever away from Death Notch!

Two days later they arrived in sight of Pioche; here the Unknown drew rein, and said: "Calamity! Is it possible my deception has been so clever as to deceive your shrewd eyes all this time? I am Deadwood Dick, who holds a mortgage of betrothal against you!"

And he removed the disguise that had served him since being rescued from the quicksand—which rescue, he explained was performed by Siska, the Pawnee, just as it was almost too late. Doomed he had been; but for her he would have perished from the face of the earth by a terrible death, and he willed that it should be so, ever after, in the minds of the people of Death Notch, and had therefore adopted and maintained the disguise of the Unknown.

That night in a private parlor at Pioche, Dick and the poor, sore-hearted, but brave and true Calamity were married, and the author joins in the wishes of his readers that they may "live long and prosper;" they, the two wild spirits who had learned each other's faults and each other's worth in lives branded with mingled shame and honor.

THE END.

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